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ABSTRACT

In 1992, a study at the University of Melbourne (Australia) investigated the experiences of 1,108 freshman students in the schools of arts, economics, and commerce. Based on the results, areas for improvement in curriculum design and faculty development were identified. The three faculties were then invited to develop teaching and curriculum initiatives to improve the first-year curriculum of participating departments, provide faculty development opportunities for staff, and disseminate the project's work within the university. Nine departments were funded to give release time to 18 faculty members for group seminars and workshops; in most cases, one less experienced and one more experienced staff member from each department worked together. Emphasis was placed on innovative ideas and new pedagogical models. Focus group discussions were also conducted with students to explore the first-year experience. In May 1994, participants presented their work to department heads and deans at a seminar. In this report, the 1992 survey and results are described, summaries of the focus group work and departmental reports are provided, and case studies of biology, Chinese, and fine arts department projects are presented. (MSE)

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Enhancing the First Year Experience

March 1995

A project funded by the National Staff Development Fund (Cathie Fund)

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Introduction

In 1992 the Centre for the Study of Higher Education conducted a survey of 1108 first year students in three faculties: Arts, Economics and Commerce, and Science. The major aims of the project were to identify priorities for the improvement of teaching and learning and to investigate the nature and levels of student satisfaction with teaching, courses, and the university.

The survey report, *Quality in the First Year Experience*, by Craig McInnis, identified a high level of satisfaction with the university overall while at the same time indicating areas which the faculties could address. The results varied to some extent by faculty but there were some common themes. The major problems indicated by student responses concerned the amount and quality of feedback on student progress, and the need for clear goals and standards.

Using a grant from the National Staff Development Fund (Cathie Fund), the CSHE invited the three faculties concerned to develop teaching and curriculum initiatives which, combined with staff development strategies, addressed areas of concern raised in the 1992 study. The project commenced in Semester 2 1993 and continued through to Semester 2 1994. It had the following aims:

- to improve an aspect of the first year curriculum of participating departments
- to provide professional development opportunities for the staff involved
- to disseminate the work of the project within the university.

Nine departments were funded to give time release to eighteen academics to work with the support of the Academic Development Group of the CSHE over a series of group seminars and workshops. In most cases, one more experienced staff member (including several course co-ordinators) and one less experienced staff member undertook the project.

The goals of the project in each department were developed in consultation with the CSHE and progress reports were presented at a series of meetings in second semester 1993. Emphasis was placed upon innovative ideas and new pedagogic models. Participants linked staff development to curriculum development, through the evolution of restructured courses around appropriate pedagogic imperatives. Supporting these efforts, the CSHE co-ordinated a series of focus group discussions with students which explored in depth students' experiences of their first year.

In May 1994 each of the nine staff pairs presented their work to a seminar to which heads and deans were invited. As well, each team submitted a written report of their project to the CSHE. These reports documented the curriculum issues that were the focus of the project, and the outcomes, both in terms of staff development and curriculum development.

Outcomes

A number of departments (Chinese, Mathematics, Fine Arts, Economics) sought to incorporate a variety of new technologies in their teaching. The relevance of tutorials to lectures was addressed by departments in

different ways. The Biology, Physics and Accounting departments, for example, redesigned their courses to achieve a stronger degree of integration of tutorial and/or practical material with lectures. Economic History and Fine Arts, by contrast, envisaged their new tutorial programs as clearly focused skills-development sessions which would enable students to monitor their own progress and to accrue a range of skills required at university level.

The English Department conducted an in-depth survey of the views of first year students and teaching staff which resulted in materials being prepared to allow substantial restructuring of the first year course and the training of first year tutors. The Economics Department responded to student concerns about the 'real world' application of their studies by designing and implementing a new first year course on economics and the environment.

Staff have expressed unanimously positive views about the opportunity the project provided for skills development in their own teaching practice, in many cases in the context of curriculum innovation. Reports of student satisfaction with the initiatives have been very positive, and in areas of ambivalence, the use of surveys and questionnaires designed in the light of the Cathie Project have enabled problem areas to be readily identified and addressed.

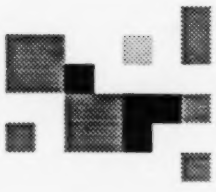
In all, the concept of experienced and less experienced staff working collaboratively under CSHE guidance on current teaching issues proved to be an effective strategy for staff development.

The first section of this report presents the findings of the study *Quality in the First Year Experience*. It is followed by a summary of the findings of the focus groups established by the CSHE. A brief report on the programs put in place by the nine departments follows, together with three expanded case-studies.

Quality in the First Year Experience: University of Melbourne 1992

Craig McInnis

A Survey of Student Perceptions in the Faculties of Arts, Economics and Commerce, and Science at the University of Melbourne



Quality in the first year experience

This section presents the findings of the study Quality in the First Year Experience conducted in 1992.

Purpose and method of the survey

In July 1992 a survey of first year students was conducted across three faculties at the University of Melbourne—Arts, Economics and Commerce, and Science. This was the initial phase of a three year study of the first year experience, funded by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education. The project was prompted by recent policy and research developments aimed at identifying and developing a quality ethos for teaching in higher education (Williams 1992, HEC 1992). The study contributes to an understanding of what constitutes quality from the student perspective. For the university the study has an internal purpose in that it increases an understanding of students and their needs in the first year. It also provides benchmarks to enable faculties to assess their initiatives for quality enhancement. In the shorter term the study will also identify priorities for the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning in the first year.

In a competitive higher education climate where students are making a substantial financial contribution to their education, their views on the quality of teaching and services now have more salience than in the past. As the Times Higher Education Supplement emphasised recently: '[O]ld criticisms are taking on a new urgency. Those enrolled in a mass higher education system, making ever larger sacrifices to get their degrees, will demand more than their predecessors' (19/3/93). The development of the Student Charter in the UK is clear evidence of this heightened concern with the quality of teaching from the student perspective.

With the pressure of larger classes and the widely held view that the range of student abilities in any given class is greater than ever before, lecturers are faced with a particularly difficult challenge in maintaining, let alone improving, standards of teaching. The results of the survey reported here should give some guidance in the establishment of priorities for strategies to improve the quality of the first year experience.

The purpose of the survey questionnaire was to investigate the early experience of a representative sample of students from the three largest faculties—which also have the largest classes—with special emphasis on the quality of teaching and learning. The survey focused on:

- student orientations towards the university, especially their sense of purpose and belongingness
- student perceptions of the nature and quality of teaching in the course overall, including some comparisons with their experience in Year 12
- the nature and levels of student satisfaction with the university and with the course for which they were enrolled
- student background characteristics and orientation related to their perceptions of teaching and learning, sense of identity and levels of satisfaction.

There are three interdependent sets of variables related to the quality of teaching and learning examined in the survey. First there are the characteristics and experiences students bring with them to the university such as their levels of academic achievement, goal direction and social background. The second group of variables is directly related to the process of teaching and learning which include students' perceptions of the feedback given on their progress, the workload and the appropriateness of assessment. Finally, there are the broader contextual factors of the university influencing satisfaction, patterns of achievement and the experience of learning, such as the quality of the services provided, the location and physical environment.

Few studies of the first year experience address both the quality of the learning experience and the broader factors that contribute to student satisfaction with the course as a whole. The recent development of performance indicators has encouraged the development of direct measures of student evaluation of the quality of teaching at the level of the course and this has opened the opportunity for comparisons within disciplines across institutions (Linke 1991, Ramsden 1991). These measures, and a range of established tests of student satisfaction, formed the core of the questionnaire.

Most studies have focused on levels of satisfaction or transition problems (Elsworth 1982, Mitchell 1990, Watkins 1982, Williams 1982). There has been a preoccupation with the problems some students have in adjusting to university study and in particular there has been a long tradition of studying students who leave university soon after commencement.

This study was not aimed directly at identifying patterns of problems related to discontinuation. The questionnaire was mailed to students in July 1992 with two follow-up mailouts. The responses to the questionnaire included only students who were still enrolled at the time of the survey.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was divided into four sections. Section A collected basic demographic data (age, sex, school background, average marks, country of birth, sources of income, etc.), and information about student use of and satisfaction with various university services and facilities (e.g. child care, counselling). There were also some satisfaction scores for various types of course advice that had been received prior to enrolment.

Section B included the Course Experience Questionnaire (Ramsden 1989), an instrument designed to measure student perceptions of various aspects of teaching and learning in the course overall (quality of teaching, appropriateness of assessment, etc.), some items on general satisfaction with the course as a whole and with the university, and opportunity for open comments. It is also worth noting that first year students are more generally more critical of teaching than later year students and students from large established universities are less likely to be enthusiastic about the quality of teaching. Similarly, students in large courses are more negative about such aspects as staff availability and feedback on progress.

Section C of the questionnaire consisted of another 29 items covering student perceptions of a range of aspects of university life, as well as items measuring student goal direction and sense of institutional belongingness. Section D was designed for students who had completed Year 12 in 1991 and focused largely on questions concerning comparisons between school and university.

The Sample

The questionnaire was mailed to random samples of 500 first year Arts and 500 first year Science students, and to all (495) first year Commerce students at the University of Melbourne. At the time of the survey there were 1096 students enrolled in first year Arts, and 951 in first year Science. A three-stage mailout was employed in an attempt to maximise the response rate. The number of questionnaires finally coded and analysed was 1108, or about 75% of the total sent out. Of these, 360 students (33% of sample) were from Arts, 379 (35% of sample) were from Science, and 354 (32% of sample) were from Commerce. The remainder of students—comprising less than 1 per cent—were undertaking various combined courses.

A clear majority of the respondents were full-time, 18 years old and born in Australia. There was a bias towards females in the sample (59%), although this is close to the average for first year students in 1992 as a whole, which is about 57 per cent. Most students (64%) lived with their family or guardians and were financially dependent on the family (66%). The University of Melbourne was the first preference for 87 per cent of the sample. It is worth noting that in 1992 VCE cut-off scores jumped quite dramatically for many courses and it is fair to say that this cohort of students arrived at the University of Melbourne in one of the most competitive periods on record. Most of these students had taken part of the new VCE in years 11 and 12 which came fully into operation in 1992. (The sample composition is described more fully in the appendix at the end of this section.)

Faculty Similarities and Differences

Although this was not planned as a comparative exercise between the three faculties surveyed, some differences are reported. Generally speaking the 1108 students in the sample have a lot in common. They express similar levels of institutional belongingness and goal direction, and they share a high level of satisfaction with the University of Melbourne overall regardless of faculty. Similarly, while Williams (1982) found some disciplinary differences on the student experience and satisfaction scales there were generally no differences between Arts, Science and Economics students.

In this 1992 survey there were, however, significant differences in the level of satisfaction with the course. Arts students were more satisfied than Commerce students, who in turn were more satisfied than Science students. There were also faculty differences in the perceptions of staff-student relationships. Likewise, there were disciplinary differences in perceptions of teaching and learning reflecting those found in national surveys (Ramsden 1991). Responses on the Course Experience Questionnaire scales differed significantly across the faculties—following similarly large between-field differences in national

surveys—with the exception of the responses to the Clear Goals Scale. Since it is not necessarily appropriate to compare the fields of study within institutions, the faculty deans received a separate report describing their student responses on a range of items related to teaching.

Perceptions of Quality in Teaching and Learning

The Higher Education Council (HEC) recently argued that quality is 'a relative concept, meaningful only from the perspective of those judging it at the time and against some standard or purpose' (1992:6). One set of standards has come about from theoretical and empirical work on teaching effectiveness. The Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) used as part of this survey has been promoted as an indicator of effective teaching (Linke 1991, Ramsden 1991). In the CEQ, students are given the opportunity of agreeing or disagreeing on a five point scale in response to a series of statements on teaching and learning. The CEQ does not test everything that might contribute to quality teaching, it is focused on some important aspects that students are in a good position to judge. Previous work has shown aggregate-level associations between the quality of student learning and student perceptions of teaching (Ramsden 1991:132). The relevant conclusion is that where academics and departments demonstrate qualities such as openness to students, clear goals and standards, and enthusiasm in teaching, students learn more effectively. This is the nub of student quality judgements.

The responses on these items do not, however, tell us whether this group of students regard the aspects of effective teaching identified in the CEQ as important in their judgements of quality although studies of student perceptions of teaching consistently identify the aspects explored by the CEQ as common concerns of students. What matters to students in their global judgements of satisfaction with the university may have little to do with the daily experience of teaching of a particular department. More importantly, the judgements do not tell us about the quality of the curriculum content. Students are not usually in a strong position to judge the relevance or significance of the material taught. This does not mean that their views should be ignored.

Good Teaching

The results for the Good Teaching Scale are shown in Figure 1. The figure shows the items arranged in order according to the level of agreement with each item. All but one of the items are positively worded. The overall picture is fairly negative, although it should be noted that there was a very high level of uncertainty on the part of students about most of the items. At best this perhaps says that the students were not immediately impressed with the quality of teaching. It may be speculated that they were suspending judgement until they had received more reports on their progress. Even so, only a minority of students had the impression that staff try to make their subjects interesting and even fewer thought that staff were good at explaining things. These are fundamental elements of quality in teaching and need to be addressed.

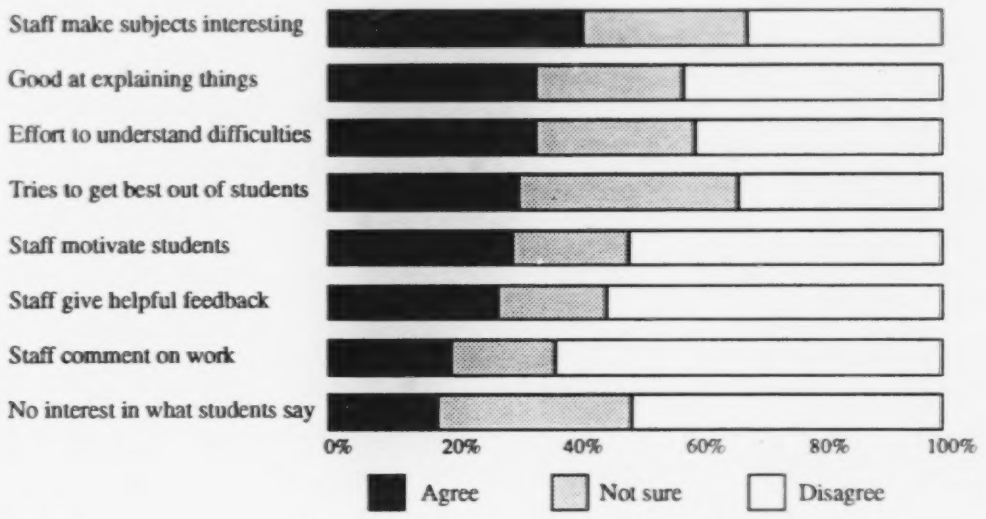
From the analysis of this sample it appeared that the items on feedback formed a very strong group which could be meaningfully separated from other aspects identified by the scale. The discussion that follows is structured accordingly. The other aspect of the scale discussed in more detail is the level of motivation and support for learning given to students.

Feedback on Progress

A majority of students were clearly negative about the amount and quality of feedback they got from teaching staff. In this analysis it was found that the items directly concerned with feedback formed a strong group clearly separate from other items. It seems reasonable to assume that students in their very first semester are particularly anxious about their academic performance, both in absolute and relative terms. Wanting to know if they are matching up—to the expectations of the university and to their new peers—seems a perfectly natural concern. Students coming direct from secondary school have been rather used to close and constant attention from teachers, and have generally had clear benchmarks for their performance.

Finding the new benchmarks is a problem. Only 28 per cent agreed with a key item that 'Teaching staff here normally give helpful feedback on how you are going'. Even fewer (20%) agreed that 'Staff here put a lot of time into commenting on students' work'. In fact two-thirds of the sample were clearly negative on this item. However, it should be

Figure 1: Responses to Good Teaching Scale Items



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noted that 58 per cent of students were satisfied with the actual time it took for assignments to be returned to them.

Motivation and Learning

Support given to students in their learning is expressed in a number of ways by their teachers. The impression students form about the expectations their teachers have of them is a powerful influence on motivation to learn and academic achievement. Students also make judgements of the quality of teaching based on their perception of how clearly lecturers explain their subject matter and the level of interest they generate. In this survey the perception that staff are concerned to 'motivate students to do their best work' was shared by only 30 per cent of the sample. The ambivalent response on a similar item—'This course really tries to get the best out of all its students'—might be a result of the students having so little experience of the course, or for that matter, as noted later, not identifying with the goals of the university at the level of the course. Alternatively, it could be said that insufficient attention is given to establishing and maintaining an ethos of achievement.

In addition to motivating students and showing an interest in their progress, the ability to provide clear explanations of subject matter and to relate the work to the student's abilities and experience is usually considered to be a prerequisite for effective teaching. The responses to two items on the good teaching scale were very similar in terms of the range of responses and, interestingly, across the faculties. First, only 34 per cent of students agreed that 'The staff make a real effort to understand difficulties students may be having with their work' and second, the same number agreed that 'Our lecturers are extremely good at explaining things to us'. Only 42 per cent of the sample had the impression that teaching staff 'work hard to make their subjects interesting to students'. Again, this may be a consequence of inappropriate or unrealistic expectations of university teaching. The point is, as the following section emphasises, these perceptions need to be addressed: students should have a clear understanding of what the teaching is aiming to do. Of course, it may well be that staff need to work at making their subjects more interesting, which is not to be confused with making them merely entertaining.

Goals, Standards and Expectations

It is important in any course to set and convey clear goals, standards and expectations. Students cannot be expected to perform to their best ability if they have only a vague notion of what is required of them. They should not have to pick up the point of the course by osmosis. Valuable time, energy and motivation is lost when the course appears to lack purpose. Whether the problem is one of communication is difficult to tell from this survey. In any event, as Figure 2 shows, the students in this sample were not clear as to what was required of them.

Fifty-eight per cent of students agreed with the negative statement 'It is often hard to discover what is expected of you in this course'. Only a third of students could agree that 'You usually have a clear idea of where you're going and what's expected of you in this course'. This was one item where students were more likely to have an opinion:

a third disagreed, and 19 per cent *definitely* disagreed. That is, just over half the students did *not* feel they had a clear idea of where the course was leading.

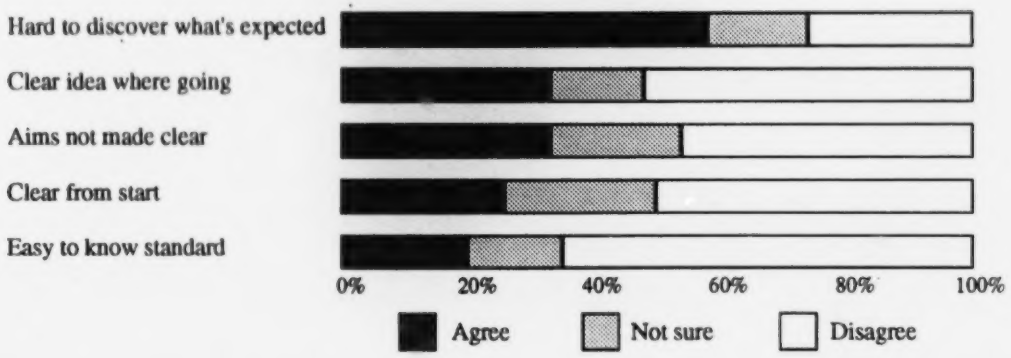
Likewise, a third of students had the impression that 'the aims and objectives of this course are not made very clear'. This was reinforced by the low level of agreement (25%) to the item 'The staff here make it clear right from the start what they expected from students'. Since in many cases the students completed the questionnaire before they received their first semester examination results it is not surprising that 65 per cent disagreed with the statement 'It's always easy here to know the standard of work expected of you'.

It is difficult to understand why students, in all three faculties, were not at this stage of the course clear about the goals. Having a substantial number of the sample right across the faculties being unclear about the expectations of their courses in July suggests that they are not getting adequate information at a number of levels. This bears investigation particularly at the level of individual subjects where responsibility for setting and maintaining direction is carried throughout the semester.

Workload

The Course Experience Questionnaire includes five items on 'Appropriate Workload' shown in Figure 3 which were developed on the assumption that overloading students with work is counterproductive to effective learning. Issue may be taken with this view if, for instance, the goal of the course is to sort out students who cannot cope with out students who cannot cope with organising and remembering large amounts of information. On the other hand, if the desired outcome in a first year course is to provide a solid foundation of thoroughly understood concepts, principles and so on, then curriculum and timetable overload is a serious obstacle to effective learning.

Figure 2: Response to Clear Goals and Standards Scale



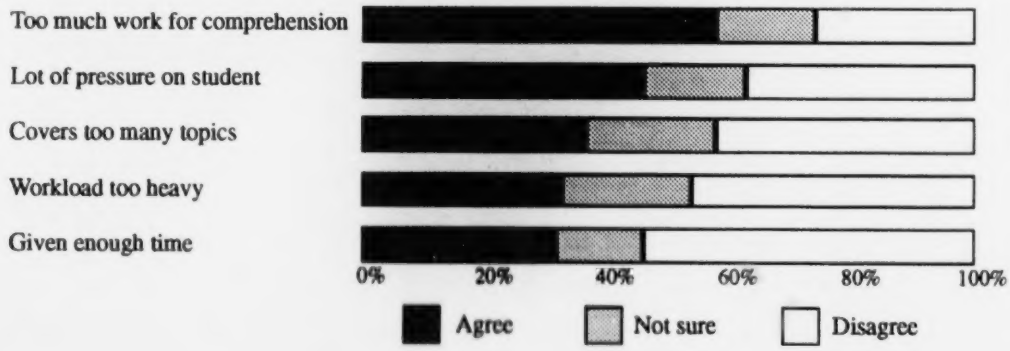
Fifty-eight per cent of the students felt that 'The sheer volume of work to be got through in this course means that you can't comprehend it all thoroughly'. The last item shows that only a third of the students thought that 'We are generally given enough time to understand what we have to learn'. Not surprisingly, 46 per cent of the sample agreed that 'There's a lot of pressure on you as a student here' which, of course, as with workload, is not the same as saying there is *too much* pressure. Part of the problem is that the syllabus 'tries to cover too many topics' (37%). This raises an issue of system-wide significance for undergraduate courses—the trend towards curriculum overload.

On the key item for this section—'The workload is too heavy'—where a third of the students agreed, it is important to remember that they were no doubt making direct comparisons with Year 12. One of the biggest problems of transition from Year 12 to university is not with the amount of work but with the constant pace.

In Section D of the questionnaire, 80 per cent of the sample said that it was easier to slip behind with work at university than it was in Year 12. On a range of questions for students who had completed Year 12 in 1991, almost half of the students (47%) said their workload was heavier at university, and more than half (55%) found the work more demanding. In the same group of students, 57 per cent reported they were actually having difficulty keeping up with work at university. Nevertheless, to repeat, most students did not feel that the workload was overall too heavy.

There were marked faculty differences in perceptions of workload which suggests the need for closer examination of the context in which students are making their judgements. Only 18 per cent of Arts students thought the workload was too heavy compared with 40 per cent of Science and Commerce students. The differences were not consistent since, of course, the amount of class contact time varies considerably. Science students seemed to have the greatest amount of workload pressure influencing their perceptions of the quality of teaching.

Figure 3: Responses to Appropriate Workload Scale



Almost half the Science students felt the syllabus tried to cover too many topics and 69 per cent of them believed that the sheer volume of work inhibited their level of comprehension.

Economics students were generally similar to Science students. In contrast, Arts students were more likely to feel they had enough time to understand what they had to learn although a significant number still felt that the volume of work made comprehension problematic.

Perceptions of the Student as Learner

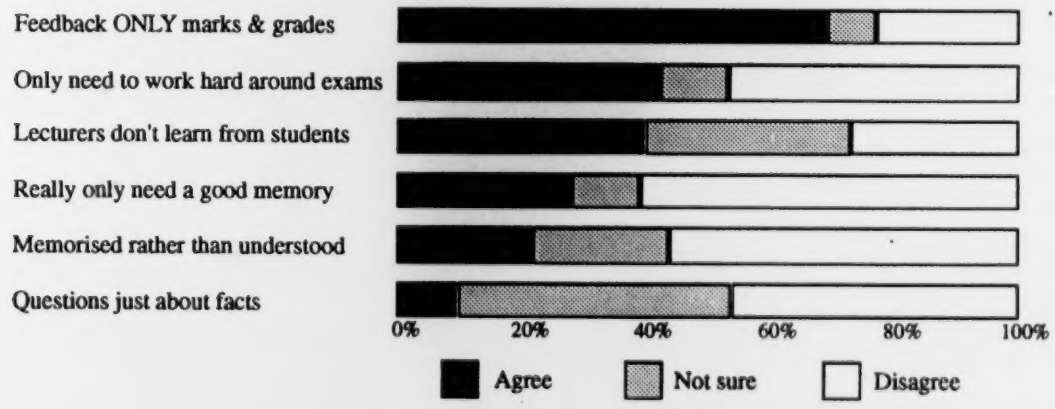
Responses to two sets of items, the appropriate assessment and the independence scales, appear to have less relevance to the first year experience. Figures 4 and 5 below give the results for the two scales but further analysis is underway to place these in the context of the first year experience. Individual items however reflect some important differences between school and university from the student perspective that need to be changed if the quality of teaching in first year is to improve.

The responses imply an approach to teaching that assumes the students are passive rather than active learners. For example, in Figure 4, 40 per cent of the sample thought that the lecturers 'frequently give the impression that they haven't anything to learn from students'. This may well be different from the school experience for many students who are used to actively contributing to their learning. From another perspective, it is a fundamental of good teaching that one should start with what the learner knows. If first year students do not feel encouraged to contribute to their learning, the outcomes may be less productive, and contribute to a negative view of the subject and the teacher, or at best, an instrumental approach to learning. It is a phenomenon that deserves closer study.

Appropriate Assessment

The appropriate assessment items in Figure 4 were developed on the assumption that courses that encourage students to rote learn produce relatively superficial learning outcomes. In this survey these items also give some indication of assumptions about the student as learner that are inherent in the course structure.

Figure 4: Responses to Appropriate Assessment Scale



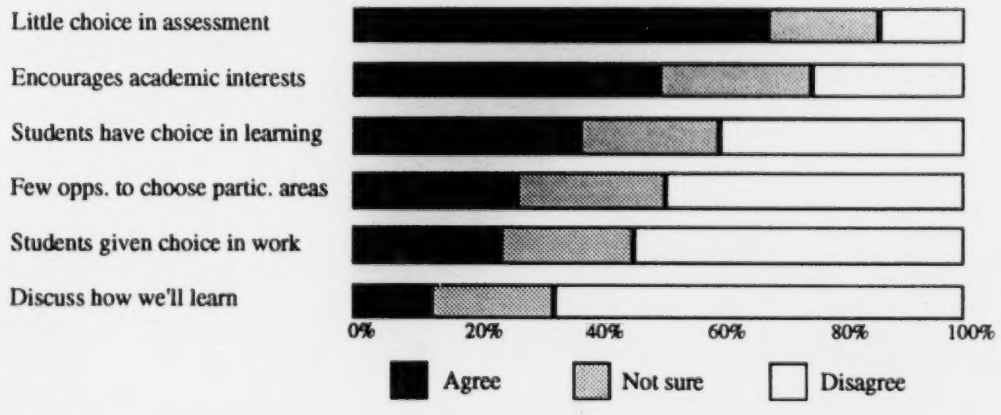
The first item relates strongly to the issues of feedback discussed earlier. Some 69 per cent of students agreed that 'Feedback on student work is usually provided ONLY in the form of marks and grades'. There are obvious disciplinary differences here. The item, 'Lecturers frequently give the impression that they haven't anything to learn from students' was agreed to by 40 per cent of the students. The message from students may be that they do not really engage with teaching staff in the process of learning.Forty-two per cent of the sample agreed after only one semester that 'It would be possible to get through this course just by working hard around exam times'. This is puzzling when so many students commented on the difficulty and, presumably, the importance of keeping up with the work. These views were fairly well distributed across the three faculties although there was slightly more agreement in Commerce and Science than in Arts. Despite this focus on marks, grades and examinations, 62 per cent of the students do not believe that 'To do well in this course all you really need is a good memory'. This was confirmed by a similar response to the key item 'Staff here seem more interested in testing what we have memorised than what we have understood', which was supported by only 23 per cent of the students.

However, only 10 per cent thought that 'Too many staff ask us questions just about facts', but there was a high level of *not sure* responses (44%) on that item. This again raises the issue of goal clarity in all courses.

Student Independence

The student independence scale is based on the assumption that students who are encouraged to take responsibility for their study are more likely to learn more effectively. While a substantial number of responses were in the 'not sure' category on this scale there are some items which have implications for improving the quality of teaching. Half the students did believe that the course encouraged them to develop their academic interests, within limits, which is a positive sign given some of the more negative observations about independence. The first item on Figure 5 shows that 68 per cent of students agreed 'There's very little choice in this course in the ways you are assessed'. Just how important this is to staff and students at the first year

Figure 5: Responses to Student Independence Scale



level remains to be seen, but it seems reasonable to speculate that neither staff nor students at this level (and in these large classes) feel it appropriate that students should have a great deal of say in assessment. Some courses are very tightly structured and in any case there is no room to negotiate outside handbook prescriptions. While exactly half the students thought the course 'seems to encourage us to develop our own academic interests as far as possible', only 37 per cent felt that 'students have a great deal of choice over how they are going to learn in this course'. On the other hand almost half of the students *disagreed* with the negative item 'There are few opportunities to choose the particular areas you want to study'. However, only a quarter agreed with the key item for this scale that 'Students here are given a lot of choice in the work they have to do'. That is, the sense of choice and independence seems to be confined to the broader decisions at the faculty or department level.

Of most relevance to strategies aimed at improving the quality of teaching is the response of more than two-thirds of the students who did *not* agree that they discussed how they were going to learn with their lecturers or tutors. Knowing how they are expected to approach the subject is helpful in orienting students to the conventions of the discipline. It is not difficult or time-consuming to let them know the preferred approach. The fact of large classes is not sufficient grounds on which to reject this important practice.

The student perceptions on independence can be summarised as indicating little choice in assessment, some choice in approaches to learning and some opportunity for students to develop their own academic interests. None of this tells us how important these things are to the students, how appropriate they are to particular disciplines, or whether the level of independence and choices provided in the courses matched the student expectations. These are matters for further investigation.

Staff-Student Relationships

In addition to the Course Experience Questionnaire, five items were adapted from a scale concerned with staff-student relationships (Williams 1982) and two items on mixing and friendships with peers (Walker 1980). Some of the staff-student items were more directly related to the quality of teaching and learning and should be seen as part of the general concern for feedback on progress. The items indicate the level of interest of staff in the progress and welfare of students, and especially their availability for informal consultation. As Williams points out: 'This is an aspect of university life to which new students would be particularly sensitive' (1982:85).

It is of interest that in 1980 Williams found Melbourne students to be less satisfied on staff-student relations than students at most other universities. While the responses to the items in Table 1 below do not suggest an entirely negative picture, there are areas of concern. The students were fairly evenly divided on three aspects: as to whether they enjoyed the chance of getting acquainted with academics; on their satisfaction with the opportunity for informal contact; and with the availability of staff. It is fair to say that about a third of students overall were basically *not* satisfied with the quality of staff-student

interaction. A striking feature of the responses was the high percentage of students who, by the end of the first semester, were still unsure about their relationships with staff. While we don't know just how important these things are to the Melbourne students, these results are negative. It again raises the question as to why students are not clear even at this stage about their expectations of academic staff.

The responses to three items based on a staff-student relationship scale are particularly informative. While 58 per cent of students agreed that 'Lecturers and tutors are willing to talk with students outside of class time', and 39 per cent agreed that 'My lecturers and tutors are readily available for discussion about my course work', only 19 per cent agree that 'Most lecturers and tutors take interest in my progress'. Read another way, 81 per cent of students either responded negatively or were not sure if their lecturers were concerned with their progress (22 per cent were *strongly* negative on this issue). This item contributed most to an alternative good teaching scale in the analysis and may well be one of the most important indicators of quality in teaching in future surveys.
At best, the messages students received about staff interest in them as learners in their initial experience were mixed. Student satisfaction with the opportunity for informal contact with academic staff was not high (31%). It was probably too early for students to decide if they enjoyed the chance to get acquainted with academic staff; 46 per cent of students were not sure, but there was a predictable tendency for older students to agree more with this item.

Not surprisingly, students who were performing better academically were also more likely to say they enjoyed meeting academic staff. No doubt confidence and success play a role in both cases since those students who were obtaining the best marks also felt that their lecturers and tutors took the most interest in their progress. The power of this benign cycle of competence and confidence has long been observed in education. The challenge as always for educators is to intervene to generate a positive climate encouraging all students to achieve their best.

Student Adjustment and Orientation

How students see themselves and their

Table 1: Staff-Student Relationship Scale Percentage Responses

	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree
Lecturers and tutors are willing to talk with students outside of class time	18	24	58
I enjoy the chance of getting acquainted with the academic staff	26	46	29
Most lecturers and tutors take interest in my progress	54	27	19
Most lecturers and tutors take interest in my progress	54	27	19
I am satisfied with the opportunity for informal contact between academic staff and students outside the class	32	37	31

futures early on in their course is only partly an indication of the quality of the institution, the course and the process of teaching and learning. Self-perceptions also have a lot to do with the personal qualities and experiences that students bring to the university. Student adaptation to the university is an interactive process of aligning students' experiences and expectations with those of the institution and faculty.

Two aspects of student orientation were considered important for the first year study: the goal direction of the students and their sense of institutional belongingness. Both give an indication of the matching process as students align their aspirations and expectations with the goals and practices of the university. An important assumption of the study is that the student is an active partner with the institution in the process of becoming a student, and hence the survey also included items on student academic involvement, as well as the use of facilities and social activity.

The Goal Direction scale is one of two adapted from the Questionnaire on University Experience (QUE) used by Williams in a 1980 Goal Direction national survey of the early experience of university students. Students who have a strong sense of goal direction are considered to have 'clearly formed objectives relating to their university attendance' (Williams 1982:70). This is an important scale in relation to students who are likely to fail or discontinue. In the 1980 national survey, University of Melbourne students were reported to be amongst the least clear about their goals. Not so for this sample. Indeed, as Table 2 shows, after one semester the Arts, Commerce and Science students were very positive and quite clear about their goals in the terms of the questionnaire items. In the table, the three categories of response have been collapsed from a five point scale which ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Of all the items in the questionnaire presented to students, the one on which there was strongest agreement concerned their goals;

Table 2: Goal Direction Scale Percentage Responses

	Disagree	Not sure	Agree
I am clear about the reasons I came to university	12	7	81
After all the effort to get a place at university, I'm not sure it's what I really want	62	15	23
I think I am at university for the wrong reasons	75	16	9
Being at university is just filling in time while I decide on my future	71	13	16
I feel confident that I made the right decision to come to university	7	15	78
Being at university will help me get what I want in life.	8	18	74

while 81 per cent agreed that 'I am clear about the reasons I came to university', 52 per cent actually *strongly agreed*. Almost as many (78%) felt confident they had made the right decision to come to university and again only a small group (7%) were *not* confident. A slightly larger number (16%) thought they were 'just filling in time' at university while they decided on their futures.

Despite the gloom in the broader community about the employment prospects for graduates, these students showed a high level of confidence in their goal direction at university. Indeed, 40 per cent felt *strongly* that 'Being at university will help me get what I want in life', and overall 74 per cent agreed. Only 8 per cent disagreed with this statement.

As indicated earlier, there were no statistically significant differences between the faculties overall on the scale, but there were some notable differences on two items. Commerce students were more likely to agree that they were clear about the reasons they came to university (87%) than Science (81%) and Arts (76%) students. Slightly more Commerce students (79%) than Science (75%) and Arts (68%) students felt that being at university would help them get what they wanted in life.

While the differences in the vocational focus of the students in the faculties makes the result predictable, the important point is that, far from feeling aimless or marking time, most first year students were clear about what they expect from the university.

Institutional Belongingness

Students who score positively on the institutional belongingness scale clearly identify with the university, and according to Williams they have 'made a comfortable entry to life there. Being at university is a rewarding experience for them' (1982:63). For this study, the sense of identification with the university was not as clear as the sense of goal direction, but strong nevertheless. As Table 3 shows, 72 per cent of students agreed that they really liked being a university student. Sixty-seven per cent did *not* feel out of place at university and 75 per cent felt suited to university life.

The students were less certain about some items. Almost a third had yet to decide if they really belonged by the end of first semester, and many were not sure if they 'really felt alive' as a result of being at university. With only half of the students feeling they really

Table 3: Institutional Belongingness Scale Percentage Responses

	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree
I don't think university life really suits me	75	17	8
Whenever I think about it I really like being a university student	11	17	72
I feel I really belong at university	18	31	51
University just hasn't lived up to my expectations	53	23	24
I feel out of place at university	67	19	14
Since I've been at university I've really felt alive	24	38	38

belonged, questions can be raised about the need for structures and processes to encourage a sense of belongingness. Perhaps too, the attitudes of academic and general staff towards students' needs examination—particularly their views on the needs and expectations of students. The item, 'University just hasn't lived up to my expectations' is of particular interest in the current climate of quality assurance. Putting aside for the moment serious reservations about consumption models of higher education, if the students are considered in any respect as 'customers'—and if quality is defined in terms of the 'attributes of a product or service which satisfy customers' expectations and perceptions at the time of purchase' (HEC 1992:6)—then the response to this item is telling. Almost a quarter of the students might be described as disappointed. Only slightly more than half of the students felt that the university was living up to their expectations; a closer examination of the responses shows that only 19 per cent felt *strongly* that their expectations were being met. One explanation might be that the students have inappropriate expectations of this university, or even university life in general. On the other hand, the students may have perfectly reasonable expectations and the university is not meeting them. Interestingly, neither the items on the questionnaire nor the open responses reveal any clear patterns indicating the causes of disappointment.

In market terms a critical test may be whether the 'customer' will buy the product again. In the case of the University of Melbourne, the results on general satisfaction items discussed later show clearly the customer judgement of quality is high; 81 per cent of these students would probably choose Melbourne again, and only one per cent would definitely not. However, this does not necessarily say that the students are satisfied specifically with the quality of the teaching or with the services; their 'buyer loyalty' may well depend on other factors such as peer acceptance, career advantage, or institutional status.

Academic Involvement

Only two items were adapted from the academic involvement scale used by Williams: 'I tend to study only those things that are essential' and 'I get satisfaction from studying'. The scores on these items indicate the level of intrinsic interest and involvement in academic pursuits. Students who appreciate academic activity for its own sake tend to perform better academically (Williams 1982:74).

In the 1982 study Williams was surprised to find that Melbourne students were the least intrinsically interested in their study; he suggested that there seemed to be an inverse relationship between the level of social advantage (as measured by socio-economic indicators) and the intrinsic score at Melbourne. In 1992, 58 per cent of the students surveyed agreed they got satisfaction from studying, while 51 per cent agreed they only study essentials. Only a fifth might be described as strongly intrinsically motivated although 34 per cent said they studied things beyond what was essential.

The two responses are not, of course, mutually exclusive. It is possible to be highly satisfied studying only the essentials.

Whether or not Melbourne students are more instrumental than other students was beyond the scope of this study. The items on academic involvement were included to test relationships between the academic orientation of students and their general levels of satisfaction. Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, the academic involvement score correlates quite strongly with student course satisfaction but less strongly with university satisfaction. This gives weight to the view that student perceptions of the university can be separated from their perceptions of their courses and the quality of teaching.

Transition Difficulties

Studies of transition difficulties for students coming direct to university from school tend to focus on the social and emotional problems of individuals. Loneliness, disenchantment, financial stress and learning problems are well-documented. Although deserving of attention, these problems tend to be experienced by a minority of students and are sometimes referred to as 'the first year syndrome'. In contrast, if the survey reported here is any indication, it is probably fair to say that most students are very positive overall about their first semester experience. As noted earlier, however, the sample does not include students who withdrew from studies.

As the belongingness and goal direction results suggest, a clear majority of the students in this sample are very positive about their first year experience. Nevertheless, there are problems related to transition which have implications for quality. For those students who did not feel they belonged, who were unsure, or whose expectations were not matched, university can be a disenchanting experience. It is important to recognise that the percentages disguise substantial numbers. For instance, the 14 per cent of respondents who felt out of place at the university represents 155 students. If this can be generalised across the total number of commencing students at the University of Melbourne after one semester it may mean something in the order of 550 students felt out of place—a sizeable number by any standards.

One of the biggest transition changes for students is the loss of close support from family and teachers. Students really are on their own academically and probably prefer it that way. Nearly 70 per cent said they got strong support from their families in Year 12 but almost all felt they no longer needed their family's moral support for study at university. Most students (68%) received no assistance with their academic work from their parents at university, 41 per cent thought their family's attitude had changed, and although almost half the sample said they still discussed university work with members of their family, only 13 per cent acknowledged that their parents still assisted them with their academic work.

More than half the students surveyed (56%) found it difficult to change their study habits to fit in with the university style, but these were clearly not serious enough for most of them to seek help from the Learning Skills Unit, which was used by about 6 per cent of this sample. Despite these problems, almost half of the students surveyed regarded university work as more fulfilling than the study they did in Year 12, but almost a quarter were not sure and 28 per cent were negative.

Summary

By the end of first semester most of the students in this sample had adjusted well to the university experience; they had a clear sense of goal direction and felt suited to university life. The students in vocational courses tend, not surprisingly, to be more instrumental in their orientation, while students in generalist courses are less certain of their goals and certainly less instrumental in their approach to university. Recognising these differences in the values and motives that students bring with them is critical to understanding their disappointment when their expectations are not met. Understanding these predispositions of students is essential to developing effective measures to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

There are a substantial number of students who, by the end of first semester, do not feel committed to their study or to the university. Their uncertainty may be reflected in their lack of participation in the classroom and in the broader activities of the university. They are not necessarily apathetic, but they certainly have not embraced the vibrant educational and social life that is supposed to represent the best that the university has to offer. Related, of course, from this section of the questionnaire was the high number of students who felt that the university was not meeting their expectations. More telling was the large number of students who early in their courses had opted to study only the essentials. Perhaps this is the breeding ground for cynicism that on occasion portrays the university life negatively in the community. In any event, these results suggest the need for a closer examination of the motives and values of the students before their judgements of quality can be properly considered.

Satisfaction with the University and Its Services

Students were asked to rate their satisfaction with the university and course in general and with student services. The specific aspects of university life identified covered almost all of the things that would concern first year students (the list was developed in consultation with staff from student services).

General Levels of Satisfaction

Most first year students surveyed were satisfied with the course they chose (77%) and even more with the university as a whole (88%). Eighty-one per cent of students said they would choose the university again, and indeed, 46 per cent said they *definitely* would. But at the same time, as noted earlier, barely half of the students (53%) felt that the university lived up to their expectations. Clearly they were not all that disappointed, but some work needs to be done to find out just what their expectations were.

Two factors that influenced levels of satisfaction were finance and accommodation. Students claiming Austudy as a major source of income (21%) were slightly less satisfied with their

course but this did not seem to affect their satisfaction with the university. Those students renting (15%) recorded lower levels of satisfaction with the university overall but it is difficult to detect any differences in satisfaction with the course in relation to accommodation. There was no statistically significant difference in levels of satisfaction with course or university between students from private or government schools.

The students least satisfied with their course by faculty were those in Science. Full-time students recorded lower satisfaction with their courses than did part-timers. Those who intended changing their course in second year (28%) were, not surprisingly, less satisfied than those who did not intend changing. Students who were failing or only just passing were less satisfied than those who were obtaining good grades.

Students born in a non-English-speaking country tended to record higher levels of dissatisfaction with their course. They were also less satisfied than other students with the university experience as a whole. While 89 per cent of these students were clear about the reasons they came to university almost a third said that it hadn't lived up to their expectations. Interestingly, given that the open comments showed up some feelings of isolation and loneliness, there were no significant differences between international and local students on such items as 'I take the opportunity at university to develop friendships with different types of people'.

The Best and Worst Features of the University

When asked to make an open comment on the best features of the university about 75 per cent of the students responded. The four most common areas identified for favourable comment were: the Student Union facilities (9% of the total sample); the social life (8.7%); the 'atmosphere' (8.5 %); and the grounds (7.6%). Taken together these categories made up about 45 per cent of the best feature responses. The remaining 55% of comments covered a wide range of features with no obvious patterns. The message is clear: first year students place a lot of value on the physical and social environment of the university. Indeed, 70 per cent of the sample said they really liked the physical environment and 79 per cent liked the 'feel of the inner-city campus'.

On the negative side, 71 per cent of students took the opportunity to make a comment. These were less clustered about particular areas. The single aspect that received the most unfavourable comment was the Baillieu Library—but then only from 4.3 per cent of the sample. As noted below, 73 per cent of the sample were satisfied with the Baillieu. There were two other smaller clusters of negative comments about parking and overcrowding.

Course Advice

In response to the question 'How satisfied were you with the course advice you received prior to enrolment...?' students rated the source on a five point scale from 'very dissatisfied' to 'very satisfied'. Students were most satisfied with the course advice they got from their friends (81%) and later year

students (81%). They clearly rely on their parents for advice and were as satisfied with that source of advice as they were with enrolment day and O week materials.

The interesting distinctions between the materials and the people, and between the formal and informal advisers. Students were satisfied with the materials from enrolment day (75%), O week (79%) and Discovery Day (75%). They were not so happy with the advice from those formally designated as advisers. Ranking the levels of satisfaction reveals that students were satisfied with advice from friends, later year students, parents, relatives and 'other academic staff'. In terms of course advice, students were least satisfied with school careers advisers (42%), but also with university staff: course advisers (41%) and Discovery Day Advisers (38%). There is clearly a need to examine closely the arrangements in the university for giving formal course advice and perhaps some assessment is needed of the appointment, preparation and effectiveness of the individuals responsible.

Conclusions

This is something of a long distance view of the first year experience. At this level of aggregation there are obvious limits to the conclusions that can be drawn. The study has, however, achieved an important goal in identifying major areas of concern for the quality of teaching at the first year level.

As far as the Course Experience Questionnaire is concerned comparisons with other studies are inappropriate. Judged in isolation however it is reasonable to say that the survey has identified some areas of concern in teaching at the first year level. The university needs to consider the importance of a wide range of factors contributing to student growth and learning as distinct from a narrow focus on the quality of teaching and learning in formal contact times. The challenge for universities such as Melbourne is how to maintain the 'benign' cycle that attracts the best students and which in turn enhances the reputation of the courses and that of the university as a leader in undergraduate education. This will only be achieved if talk of quality in terms of outcomes such as graduation rates is balanced by outcomes such as satisfaction with the experience of being a student. In short, it is vital to recognise, in the face of narrow instrumentalism, that the university experience is not just a preparation for life, for the students it is also a life itself.

The most important conclusions from the survey concern the quality of feedback students get about their academic progress, the failure to ensure clearly expressed goals and objectives for courses, and the general view of students as passive learners. These all add up to a need to take a closer look at the process of teaching and learning from the perspective of the student. There are no simple solutions of course; a range of strategies to improve the quality of teaching at the first year level is required. Above all it is essential to target those concerns of students that are most likely to negatively influence their perspectives and performance over the whole of their undergraduate experience.

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Appendix: 1992 Sample Composition

Most students (92%) were full time. The majority were female (59%) with notable faculty variations, i.e. 70% of females in Arts, 48% in Commerce, and 52% in Science. The mean age was 19.3; most students, however, were 18 (63%), and 90% were 20 or under and 95% were 25 or under. Most were born in Australia (75%) while 18% were born in a non-English-speaking country. A slight majority of parents were born in Australia (57% of fathers and 54% of mothers) but about a third were born in non-English-speaking countries (32% of fathers and 33% of mothers).

Most students had listed Melbourne as their first preference on their university entrance application (87%). Their school backgrounds showed 39% from independent schools, 37% had attended a government school, and 22% came from Catholic schools.

The average Anderson score for this group was 337; the range was 238 to 416. Most students (65%) had a score between 320 and 359 and 21% were in the range 330 to 339. On a self-ranking of their average assessment over the first semester, 5% of students scored H1's, 18% thought they were achieving at an H2A level, 32% rated their average at H2B, 29% were averaging P's and only 3% reported their scores at the fail level.

Most students (64%) lived with their family or guardians; 16% lived in college and 15% in rented accommodation. Parents were the major source of financial support for 66% of respondents with 21% listing Austudy as a major source. Thirty four per cent of students listed a term job as a major or minor source of income, and 15% relied on a vacation job as a major source.

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Post-script: 1994 student responses

A survey of 1994 first year students at Melbourne, undertaken as part of a CAUT (Committee for the Advancement of University Teaching) project, shows some clear improvement in responses in two areas where the university and the CSHE have been active, following the 1992 survey:

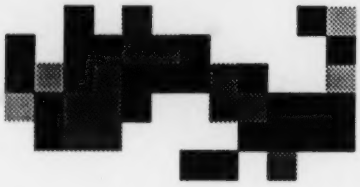
- the perceived effort of staff to make subjects interesting
- the more positive views of students on clear expectations and aims.

Some problems persist, however, such as:

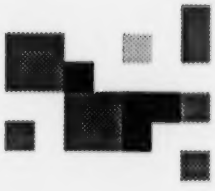
- the quality of feedback given on progress
- the availability of staff for consultation
- the effort staff make to understand the difficulties students have with their work.

It is encouraging to note that overall:

- 75 per cent of first year students agree they have been encouraged to be independent learners
- 68 per cent agree that the quality of teaching is generally good. Only 6 per cent disagree with this statement.



Student Voices: Focus Group Summaries



Student Voices: Focus Group Summaries

To explore and add to the findings of the survey of first year students at the University of Melbourne, qualitative research was undertaken in 1993 in the form of focus group discussions, where a group discussed issues raised by a moderator.

Half the questions focused on students' university experience in general, with the remaining questions focusing on students' experiences in a particular subject. Specific questions were added to the interview schedule for some subject groups, as a result of consultation with the staff members involved in the Cathie Fund Project. The results have been fed back to these departments.

A stratified random sample was constructed for each focus group from records held by student administration. Each sample of twenty students reflected the characteristics of students in that subject (however some groups such as overseas students and part time students were over-sampled in order to increase their chances of representation). Letters were sent to the sample groups informing them of the focus group and its purpose. A week before the focus group students were then telephoned to remind them of the time and to encourage them to attend. Thirty-three first year students participated in the focus groups, with the members of each group being drawn from a subject area whose staff were involved in the Cathie Project.

The focus groups were structured around such matters as: issues of teaching (e.g. characteristics of lecturers, access to staff, feedback, level of difficulty); transition (adequacy of preparation for university, expectations); institutional ethos (relationships between staff and students, workload demands); student climate (competition/cooperation, identity and belongingness).The group interviews, each of which lasted for one and half hours, were held at the CSHE in October 1993.

The findings show some consistent themes that emerged in the interviews. These themes are listed below, with illustrative student comments.(Some comments have also been drawn from the open comment section of the 1992 first year experience questionnaire.)

The best things about university

- the opportunity to meet new people
- the freedom and independence to manage one's own time
- the stimulating academic environment
- the facilities provided by the Student Union, such as the Sports Union and the Rowden White Library.

'It has to be the freedom. It's more relaxed. You can do what you want to do. I go to class, but it is nice to know you don't have to.'

'It's the social side—the variety of people and differences of opinions and ideas represented in lectures'

'I am really enjoying the work at university. I have never found study so fulfilling and stimulating.'

The greatest differences between school and university

- the number of students in lectures
- the lack of interaction in lectures; the feeling of 'just being a face in the crowd'
- the fact that the responsibility for motivation rests with the student not the teacher
- to some students, increased travelling time, which made the day very long and left them drained of energy
- the financial difficulties which some students found induced stress, or forced them to learn to budget and also to balance university work and social life
- finding is harder to meet people than at school, where they had classes with the same small group of students
- the different style of teaching at university.

'I've felt a touch of loneliness. At school you know everyone and feel you belong to that school group, it's not like that at university.'

'At school the teachers are always on your back, which can be a good thing at times. But I like managing my own time. It helps you establish study habits.'

'At school you knew everybody. There are so many people here. The lecturers don't know you.'

'Lecturers and tutors don't scare you enough when exams are coming up, but as you grow up you have to accept that it is not like school. I should be more independent.'

'It's the size, the lack of identity, the lack of direct contact.'

'You're spoonfed at school. Learning to your own research is new. Nobody said how to take notes and things like that.'

Good lecturers ...

- are seen as 'human'; they seem alive, use humour or stories about the real world to make their lectures memorable
- are interested in teaching and what they are teaching
- have clarity in presentation and can control the lecture group
- have an interest in their material and so help students to become interested.

'They know their stuff and they communicate it in language we can understand.'

'They have to be alive. Humour helps you remember things. And if they put up overheads and videos, that spices it up.'

'They're often not good at explaining. They need to explain their explanations.'

'One guy had lots of energy. He used lots of diagrams, and lots of board space. You could keep up. When he stopped, you stopped, and you could think about it. He emphasised points, so you realised you could write them down.'

Good tutors and demonstrators ...

- explain things well to students and are approachable
- are prepared to have student involvement in tutorials (a factor which a number of the students felt was one of the main benefits of tutorials)
- enjoy what they are doing and are easy to relate to
- are prepared to follow a question through if they do not know the answer themselves.

'A good tutor is approachable. They anticipate problems and asks questions like "Did you understand this idea in the lecture?"'

'Tutorials need to be a bit more focused, maybe planned more in advance, so that when you are asked to express an opinion you aren't just making it up on the spot.'

Some problems with lectures and tutorials were also signalled:

'He reads lectures as though he's delivering a paper rather than speaking to us.'

'I learn nothing in lectures where I am expected to write flat out for the full time—it's a ridiculous practice.'

'Staff generally feel first year students have nothing to offer. A little bit of praise for their effort would do wonders for the marks.'

'Some of the younger people only know what you know, they are not definite but if they are prepared to find out, to admit, then it's fine.'

'I love my course and the lecturers are great. However, there are tutors who are extremely unprofessional. They are unprepared for tutorials and have no skills in running an effective tutorial.'

'There's a lack of meaningful discussion from some students in tutorials. I think students' contributions and attendance should be taken into consideration when assessing overall marks for each subject.'

Feedback

A lack of feedback was seen as a problem by many students, particularly in subjects with only end of semester exams. Most students were happy with their level of choice in assessment but did express concern at their lack of knowledge about how their assignments were assessed and what would be considered a 'model' answer.

'Sometimes they justify the mark but don't explain how you can improve.'

'It's important if you are struggling, they should pull you aside.'

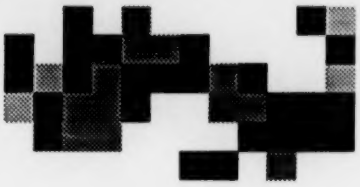
'Once you have made a mess of things there is very little chance to redeem yourself.'

Students in science subjects expressed concern at the apparent lack of relationship between practicals and lectures. They felt this made the practicals hard to understand and limited the value they gained from the practicals.

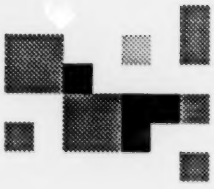
Summary of Points for Improving Practice

The focus group discussions touched on a wide range of concerns. The overall consensus of views produced the following suggestions for improved practice:

- first year students could be kept in the same small groups initially wherever possible to help them in their transition from school to university
- it would be helpful if lecturers, tutors and demonstrators teaching at the first year level were friendly, enthusiastic and keen to pass on their knowledge and, where appropriate, understood the importance of relating their subject matter to the 'real' world
- consideration could be given to ways in which more feedback can be given to students early in the semester, particularly in subjects where the assessment takes the form of end of semester exams
- more attention could be given to the consistency of information given by lecturers, tutors and demonstrators on matters such as assessment and the relative importance of subject matter
- more model answers to assessment questions could be provided to give some guidance on expectations
- clearer guidelines could be provided about what will be examined and in how much depth
- practicals could be related more directly to the lectures, particularly for the sake of less able students.



Departmental Reports



Departmental Reports

This section contains excerpts of reports written by staff involved in the Cathie Fund Project. These were written following the completion and evaluation of first year course initiatives and their presentation at the seminar held in May 1994 held to discuss the project.

Learning by Objectives in Accounting

Trevor Wise
Sandra Giandomenico

Project Aims

Our project was specifically aimed at enhancing the first year experience of students in certain currently somewhat deficient areas. Our project addressed the following concerns, as identified by students in the first year report:

- it is often hard to discover what is expected of you
- the aims and objectives of this course are not made clear
- you usually do not have a clear idea of where you are going and what is expected of you in this course
- it is not always easy here to know the standard of work expected of you
- students do not have a great deal of choice over how they are going to learn
- students here are not given a lot of choice in the work they have to do
- feedback on student work is usually provided only in the form of marks and grades.

Nature of Project

The project was to provide students with a program wherein all the components of the course follow a teaching formula known as 'learning by objectives'. Essentially, this means that each individual item in the course materials package is fully integrated, one with the others. The items are linked by common learning objectives. The individual items provide students with a fully integrated teaching and learning mechanism in which all (or some) items are utilised as required by individual students so that the maximum learning benefit is derived.

This programmed learning-by-objectives approach has the benefit of enhancing the role and value of the package of course materials supplied to students, and of lectures, tutorials and workshops. Student response has been positive and the new method has been found to address effectively each of the concerns outlined above.

Unifying Biology 101 Tutorials

Kath Handasyde
Rick Willis

Project Aims

Concern expressed by students about the relationship of tutorials to lecture content and about feedback prompted the department to restructure its tutorial program with the aims of increasing the effectiveness of tutorials and increasing the level of feedback to students.

Innovations

1994, the tutorial program was restructured to bring greater unity to tutorials, to focus more specifically on course content and to introduce sessions which provided study and exam skills and revision. Difficult areas of course content were addressed in a series of revised tutorial study questions, drafted by lecturers and tutors working in consultation.

In order to develop a system for more effective feedback within the constraints of available resources, pro-forma feedback sheets were designed which could show students ways in which their performance could be improved.

Evaluation

The results of two questionnaires administered to first year students in June 1993 and May 1994 showed a substantial increase in the overall rating of the first year Biology course. Tutorials were found to be more popular, due to the initiatives the department undertook with the help of the Cathie Fund, and to an improvement in the tutorial room itself. Feedback sheets met with a mixed response, but a number of students suggested ways in which the sheets could be improved.

(See Appendix for full details of this project).

Using New Technology in Teaching Chinese

Diane Manwaring
Wu Yunji

Project Aims

The relative scarcity of effective course materials for students of Chinese is slowly being addressed by the creation of new audio-visual and computer-based courses. The 1992 acquisition of a new video program by the department and the purchase by the Horwood language centre of the MacZi software package provided an opportunity to supplement, and potentially replace, the course book used in first year Chinese for the last five years.

New technologies do not, however, provide instant solutions, and our participation in the Cathie Project enabled us to investigate those aspects of the new programs which could be tailored to students' stated needs, and to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the materials themselves.

Implementation

In a 1993 survey, students requested an increased level of oral/aural work. In response, a decision was made to devote both more class time and more marks to this aspect of the course and to incorporate the new teaching programs into a revised timetable.

Each of the new programs provided the department with some unexpected problems, as they contained some serious errors of language and structural inconsistencies which would not permit their wholesale implementation. Time was set aside to

address these problems and to shape the material to fit in with the course structure.

Evaluation

Questionnaires distributed to students at the end of second semester 1994 showed a marked increase in overall satisfaction with the course in comparison to the previous year. In terms of self-evaluation of their own progress, the 1994 figures showed a higher level of satisfaction among students. Following revisions made to the video course, its comprehensibility was seen as markedly improved. The increased time devoted to oral work was seen, however, to have detracted from the amount of time spent on written work, and this will be addressed in course planning for 1995. The new computer course met with a mixed response. This may be due to the relatively smaller number of hours students were prepared to devote to the course outside class time.

(See Appendix for full details of this project)

Re-thinking the Economic History Curriculum

David Merrett
Katrina Alford

The Need for Change

The first semester first year subject, 326-102 Australia in the Global Economy, was revised root and branch for 1994. Its aims and objectives were changed, the subject content was revised, the tutorial program was reworked to strengthen its position in the teaching program, and four of the five people teaching in the subject taught it for the first time.

A number of factors were involved. Subjects have a 'life cycle' that eventually comes to an end. The previous version of this subject had been taught by the same people for a number of years without any significant revision. It was 'tired'. The university's and the faculty's concerns about 'quality of teaching' prompted us to ask ourselves whether we could offer a better subject to our students. We began to think about what sorts of knowledge and skills were relevant and appropriate to students enrolled in the Commerce Faculty and/or engaged in combined degrees.

What Changes Were Made?

Almost every aspect of the curriculum, teaching practice and subject administration were touched by reform. There were four key areas of change: curriculum, objectives, feedback, skills development

Curriculum

Traditionally, this subject had been taught by proceeding chronologically from 1850 or the 1880s forward to the present. Students did not find the 'past', which dominated the teaching period, particularly relevant. Many simply lost interest. This subject begins in the present by identifying the major contemporary economic issues facing Australia, and uses a study of the past to explain the present. An in-depth study of a small number of themes has had beneficial outcomes. Student interest has been maintained. It has also enabled teaching staff to explore these issues in more detail and to work more carefully through the analysis underlying our interpretation.

Objectives

We have tried to make our stated objectives 'drive' the curriculum design and teaching practice. Objectives were translated down into the micro parts of the subject. We decided upon three overarching objectives:

- the first has to do with content or subject matter: by the conclusion of the subject students will have acquired a thorough understanding of the evolution of the contemporary Australian economy, the strengths and weaknesses of the economy, and its prospects in an increasingly internationalised world.
- the second objective is to train students in the research skill of economic historians.
- the third objective is to develop written and spoken communication skills.

Feedback

Students are anxious to know what is expected of them, what it is that they are expected to know and to what standard. We have addressed this issue by implementing a program that allows students to monitor their own progress throughout the semester. At the conclusion of each set of lectures on one of the themes, the lecturer distributes a 'check list' of questions which students should be in a position to answer if they had taken good notes and done the prescribed reading.

Students prepare answers to these questions which they bring to six designated tutorials. They can assess their own level of accomplishment, in absolute terms and relative to that of their peers, in class discussion of a few of the questions. On three occasions, students are required to write an answer to one of the 'check list' questions, they do not know which one until they arrive in class. The first exercise, which was allocated 20 minutes writing time, was intended to give some guidance to the students before they began work on their major essay and also to introduce them to an exam essay-style question.

Skills Development

In the past the tutorial program mirrored the material covered in lectures. We have separated the two teaching formats. The focus of tutorials is on skill formation. It is here that students are introduced to the research methodologies of economic historians. The tutorials also provide the format for the development of communication skills, both oral and written. All students take part in four debates, for which they receive grades, and undertake writing exercises.

Outcomes

There is some indication that the revisions to the subject have been effective. The subject matter has caught the imagination of students, both Australian and those from overseas. Attendance at lectures and tutorials has been maintained at higher levels than in the past. Students have found the distribution of 'check lists' useful, and have made a good fist of answering questions from them in tutorials. As students have become involved in writing and talking in tutorials their learning has improved. Marks awarded for the research essays are significantly higher than in past years which indicates that the concerted efforts to impart research and writing skills has borne fruit.

In any new endeavour there are teething problems, and we have had our share. Overall, however, the exercise has proceeded

remarkably smoothly. This has been due to the hard work and commitment of our colleagues who believed that what we are trying to achieve is worthwhile. We thank them all.

An Environmental Focus in Economics

Robert Dixon
Dave Alden

Nature of the project

The project involved two staff working together with the department's technical officer to develop teaching materials (and especially materials to be used in lecture presentations) on the economics of the environment for use in first year Economics in 1993 and beyond.

Identification of the Need

Currently there is no treatment at all of environmental issues in our introductory macroeconomics subject; nor do the text books, even the most recent ones, devote any attention to this matter. This is of concern for two reasons. First, the relationship between the economy and the environment is of some importance and it is desirable that students be introduced to material pertaining to this link in their introductory economics subjects. Three obvious areas which should be examined in introductory (principles) subjects are:

- the notion of sustainable development
- pollution, taxes and permits
- the notion of protecting species by assigning property rights to them.

A second reason why we are concerned by the current complete lack of attention to environmental issues is one of motivation.

Many economics students are keenly interested in the environment. It must be possible to take advantage of this fact and to use environmental issues as vehicles for teaching a number of economic principles (principles which may be applied to a wide range of problems including, but not limited to, environmental problems). For both these reasons we were keen to incorporate issues relating to the economics of the environment into our first year curriculum. In order to do so it was necessary to develop new lecture material (including Powerpoint slides), tutorial exercises and workbook materials for the students. It was our particular desire to include video clips in lecture presentations dealing with key thinkers discussing sustainability, and Club of Rome simulations (since simulation experiments play an extremely important role in economics but are rarely presented or 'depicted' in lectures or tutorials).

Initiatives

An initial set of materials was assembled to allow lectures on sustainable development to be given to first year students in Introductory Macroeconomics at the end of the second semester in 1993, and for the materials to be revised in December in the light of that experience.

A complete set of materials to allow case studies of pollution taxes and tradeable permits and also property rights and endangered species, was prepared for use in the Introductory Microeconomics subject in

the first semester of 1994. (The case studies however, were 'trialed' in a new third year environmental economics subject in the second semester of 1993.)

Structural Change for the Department of English

Lyn Mc Credden
Terry Collits

Identifying needs

The Cathie Fund Project provided the English Department with an opportunity to actively review the structure of its first year. Two questionnaires were devised, one for all students of English 1 in 1993, and one for all teaching staff in English.

The report 'First Year English: Overview of Student Responses', prepared by Ms Ros Harris and based on 300 English 1 respondents, yielded the following data:

- 74 per cent of students felt positive or very positive about the content of their English course
- 70 per cent of students felt work load to be reasonable
- over 50 per cent of students found first year English to be fast or too fast
- while 56 per cent of students said course difficulty was reasonable, over 30 per cent of students regarded their English course as difficult. (It's important to note, however, that these same students most often feel positive or very positive toward their subject. In other words, 'difficulty' is not a negative response.)
- 85 per cent of students described their course as challenging or very challenging, and the same percentage felt they were learning something valuable
- 38 per cent of students were unsure whether course aims were being met.

In a free comment section of the questionnaire, concern was expressed in regard to:

- pacing of first year subjects
- quality of lectures
- the introduction of theoretical discussion in the study of English
- questions of assessment.

All teaching staff received copies of this report. (A copy of this quantitative and qualitative report is available on request from the English Department.)

The staff questionnaire sought comments concerning:

- perceived aims of first year English
- possible common content for first year subjects
- the structure of first year
- issues of assessment, pedagogy and staffing.

Areas of agreement and disagreement could thus be highlighted prior to futher discussions.

Outcomes: Curriculum Development Initiatives

In the light of a range of proposals elicited from staff in April 1994, and of discussion of subjects within the Education Sub-committee, a new and expanded first year course, consisting of ten semester-long subjects has been devised. It was to be presented for discussion to the full department committee on Friday, June 3.

The student and staff questionnaires assisted in the identification of a number of areas needing development:

- the proposed new subjects are more clearly named and focused
- consideration has been given to the development of essay writing skills within these subjects
- the place of creative writing in a number of courses is being considered
- response has been made to what have been identified as subjects popular amongst students, as well as to the addition of subjects which lead directly into the later teaching and research interests of the department.

The Education Sub-committee has also committed itself to improving the training of first year staff, especially younger sessional tutors, and establishing a process in which all first year staff will have better access to staff support systems, and to a range of materials able to be used and modified for the different first year subjects.

Timetable of Reforms

December 1994:	Discussion and approval of subjects for 1996.
Jan. - Feb. 1995:	Training of first year teaching staff.
Feb. 1995:	Final discussion of subjects and submission for Arts Faculty UGS approval.

Re-vamping Tutoring in Fine Arts

Chris McAuliffe
Angela Ndalianos

Introduction

To assist students in understanding the expectations of the university-level study, and to smoothe the transition from VCE, we designed a tutorial structure to guide first year classes in two courses through a variety of classroom activities and introduce them to the research facilities available to them on campus. The programs, in Modern and Postmodern Visual Arts 111-103, and Introduction to Cinema A: Classical Hollywood and Art Cinema 111-105, were framed to reduce repetition in tutorial format and to focus on the process of skill-formation. In addition, we revised lecture formats in order ensure that their relationship to the goals of the courses was clearly signalled.

The New Teaching Program

Course material was devised which provided a clear indication of aims and objectives for the semester as a whole, and on a week by week basis. A specifically defined topic for each week (frequently using a 'case-study' approach) was nominated and each tutorial focused on a key work of art, film or text nominated. In addition, the difficulty of assignments was increased over the semester.

Assessment was gradated to incorporate a series of small assignments each of which focussed on the development of a different skills—critical and argumentative skills, bibliographic skills, textual comprehension

and visual analysis. The rapid assessment of these pieces by tutors was promoted to enable students to keep up in a systematic way with course aims and to be better prepared for the major assignment at the end of the semester. Pro-forma comment sheets which broke down tutors' assessments into categories were used for the first time.

Evaluation

Formal course evaluation questionnaires showed that students felt that the aims and objectives of the course were clear, that they had an adequate understanding of the requirements of the subject, and that staff were available and accessible. There were no significant complaints about the workload or the standard of work required. These results tend to confirm the general impression that provision of more information has both a practical and 'psychological' benefit.

Tutors found the assignments much easier to grade because of their focus and brevity and classroom discussion revealed an almost unanimous support for formal feedback sheets accompanying graded essays. In addition, classroom discussions suggested that students gained a sense of confidence in feeling that they were able to criticise academic texts.

(See Appendix for full details of this project).

Improving Visual Aids in Mathematics

Paul A. Pearce
Danny Ralph

Project Aims

The aim of this project was to improve the use of audio visual aids in teaching Mathematics 100 by producing 80 to 100 high quality colour overhead transparencies in electronic format.

Background and Overview

Mathematics 100 is a course of 39 lectures that has been developed by the Mathematics Department over the past three years to meet the specific needs of university entrants with the VCE. Mathematics 100 is taught in both the first and second semesters of each year. It is the basic mathematics course for students from the Faculties of Science, Engineering, Agriculture and Forestry.

Past questionnaires have indicated that students find it difficult to interpret hand-drawn diagrams on the blackboard. In particular, there is a demonstrated student need for better visual aids to help them visualise surfaces etc. in three dimensions.

Implementation

This was project formulated, implemented and evaluated over the period June 1993 to June 1994. Over one hundred colour transparencies were produced, of which eighty were selected for teaching 5 lecture streams in Mathematics 618-100. Copies of the overhead transparencies were distributed to students in the form of reduced four-to-a-page black & white and greyscale copies.

Four lecture streams, comprising 600 students, used colour versions of the transparencies and one lecture stream, comprising 150 students used black and white versions of the same transparencies.

Evaluation

Questionnaires were distributed to students in lectures. Students were asked to list the features they liked best and least about the course. Responses were as follows:

- 266 out of 602 students or 41% of students listed the colour overhead transparencies among the best features of the course
- 18 out of 602 students or 3% of students listed the colour overhead transparencies among the least liked features of the course
- 77 out of 602 students or 13% of students indicated that the course would be improved by using more colour transparencies

Each of 750 Mathematics 100 students was asked to state the extent of their agreement with the following three statements:

1. The material presented on the overhead transparencies was clear and easy to read.

2. The transparencies effectively aided my understanding of the lecture material.

3. The transparencies added to the overall interest in the subject matter.

For the colour transparencies, students strongly agreed with Item 1, agreed with Item 2 and marginally agreed with Item 3. At most 15% disagreed with any item relating to colour transparencies. By contrast, for black and white transparencies, the responses were almost neutral and even marginally disagreeing in the case of Item 3.

We conclude from the questionnaires that the use of high quality colour transparencies in lectures, and the availability of student copies, has had a very positive impact on the presentation of lectures and on the general level of interest shown by students.

We are hopeful that the approach developed in this project will be used to produce colour transparencies for teaching other courses in the university that involve mathematical content or mathematical notation.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the assistance of Ben Thompson on some time-critical aspects of the project. We also acknowledge the encouragement, cooperation and indulgence of our colleagues in the Mathematics Department.

A New Laboratory Course in Physics

Zwi Barnea

The Problem

The laboratory course which is a compulsory complement to the 640-160 first year physics lecture course (taken by students without VCE physics) has in recent years become the subject of increasing criticism. The objections, raised by the students via the Staff-Student Liaison Committee and by post-graduate demonstrators, indicated that the laboratory course was too demanding for students with so little preparation in physics. In addition, students found the course difficult and

unhelpful because the laboratory exercises did not follow the course material chronologically and the topics were covered in an order that bore no relationship to that of the lecture course.

The Solution

A new laboratory course was developed, specifically designed for the needs and skills of the particular student body. The laboratory course was re-designed to chronologically follow the curriculum of the lectures and experiments and be illustrative of the principal topics covered in the lectures.

In the manual written for these new laboratory exercises, the language is intended to be clear and concise, and the reporting of experiments by the students brief (to be completed in the course of the laboratory experiment). A manual for demonstrators, developed simultaneously, includes detailed instructions for demonstrators and model tables of typical results, as well as equipment lists for each experiment to assist the technical staff; the manual lists the relevant sections of the textbook to allow students to prepare for the laboratory exercise and to highlight its connection with the material covered in the lectures.

The course chosen is a compromise between team consultation and coordination and individual performance of and responsibility for specific tasks. The team as a whole was responsible for the definition of the experiments, their general style, and the assignment of particular experiments to individual members of the team.

A review took into account all the difficulties observed and changes carried out by the demonstrators, in the course of the week, observations by the technical staff, student reactions and all other considerations. Careful notes were taken for the revision of the manual and of other changes.

Results

Twelve laboratory exercises were completed in time for the beginning of Semester 1, 1994. About two thirds of the exercises have now been used. While some revisions will be made, these in most instances are relatively minor.

Feedback

All laboratory exercises were trialed by the demonstrator who is responsible for them before the final version is included in the manual. Later, after each exercise was carried out by a number of student classes, demonstrated by members of the team developing the exercises, a 'post-mortem' was held and revisions for the 1995 manual decided upon. The student representative on the Staff-Student Liaison Committee reported that the exercises have been well-accepted by students.

Staff involved

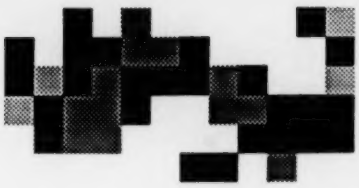
The team consisted of two academics, two technical staff, and four postgraduate demonstrators. They were: Brad Smith, Roger Rassool, Nick Nicola, Geoff Millist, Michelle Livett, Colin Entwistle, Greg Clarke, Michael Beeching, Zwi Barnea.

Concluding remarks

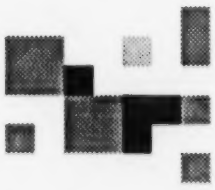
This report has described some of the initiatives underway in The University of Melbourne to enhance the quality of the first year experience. The National Staff Development Fund supported this initiative. This venture serves as an example of the advantages of bringing together staff development and curriculum development through a linkage based in contemporary research.

Nationally, the nature of the first year experience has become a matter of growing concern. During 1994, the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (McInnis, James and McNaught) has been conducting a national study commissioned by the Committee for the Advancement of University Teaching (CAUT), 'The First Year Experience: University Responses to Diversity'. The project is investigating the attitudes and experiences of first year students. In particular, it is looking at students' perceptions of courses and teaching and the responses of universities to the changing needs of their first year cohorts. The principal aim is to draw some conclusions regarding policies and practices which can enhance the teaching and learning environment for on-campus students.

The findings, due for publication in 1995, will not only raise issues at a national level, but will be used to further contribute to ongoing staff development and curriculum development within the University of Melbourne.



Appendix: Case Studies



Appendix: Case Studies

The following case studies (from Biology, Chinese and Fine Arts) provide three detailed accounts of the kind of strategies involved in re-working first year programs, and also describe a few of the hurdles which can present themselves. These case studies provide accounts of student feedback, and offer helpful insights into the possibilities for enhancing first year practices in a range of other disciplines.

Biology 101 CSHE Staff Development Project

Rick Willis and Kath Handasyde
(Departments of Botany & Zoology)

The aims of this project within first year Biology were set to:
i. increase the effectiveness of tutorials within existing resources.
ii. increase the overall level of feedback to students.

Tutorial Program

In 1993 there were 9 tutorials in Semester 1, which varied widely in their structure and coverage, due in part to the involvement of three separate departments. For 1994, the tutorial program was restructured to bring greater unity to the tutorials, to focus more specifically on course content, and to introduce sessions providing study and exam skills, and revision.

Study questions for tutorials were rewritten in conjunction with lecturing staff to focus more on 'key' or difficult areas of content, and to introduce some questions in exam format. The tutorial program was revamped, such that there 10 sessions in Semester 1.

Macintosh Self-Assessment Program

Originally it was intended to have a bank of multiple choice questions available on access within the Biology Macintosh Laboratory. The development of the question bank is still in progress in conjunction with McGraw-Hill Book Company; however, the university has elected to withhold purchase of computers for this facility until the next generation of Macintosh machines is released. Consequently this development has been shelved until 1995.

Assessment and Feedback on Laboratory Tasks

There has been a long-term teaching policy in Biology 600-101 to mark every student's laboratory notebook weekly. During the last several years, the marking of books has been the responsibility of supervising demonstrators who are highly experienced and well qualified. Over the past five years there has been a substantial increase in the number of students enrolled in Biology 600-101 (and its related subjects 600-002, 600-015, 600-112). The large number of students (over 1200 in 1994) make it difficult for supervising demonstrators to provide comprehensive feedback when marking practical books. Questionnaires completed by first year Biology students at the end of 1993 indicated that there was considerable concern about the level of feedback provided to

students in the practicals. The aim of this section of the project is to address this problem.

Specifically the aims were to:

i. increase the overall level of feedback to students on their practical performance; in particular to design and implement a system that will address the difficulty of providing comprehensive and effective feedback to a large group of students

ii. prompt the students to think about the material presented to them in practical classes, and to interpret/synthesise this information in the context of lectures and reference material

iii. achieve i. and ii. within the constraints of existing resources.

Design, Development and Implementation

Pro-forma feedback sheets, designed to indicate areas in which students could improve performance, were chosen as the most appropriate and efficient medium for supplying students with information. The feedback sheets do not provide answers to the questions set in practical tasks, rather they are designed to prompt and guide students to identifying, understanding and resolving problems they encounter while performing practical tasks. Feedback sheets were designed to include general comments pertaining to common technical errors encountered in practicals (e.g. diagrams incorrectly labelled, inaccurate representation of proportions of tissue layers in diagrams, referral to errors associated with misreading instructions, etc.), and specific comments related to material and theoretical ideas presented in each practical. Where possible comments also referred to lecture and reference material. In addition, the appropriate section of the Biology textbook was indicated as recommended reading on each sheet.

The source of information for the development of feedback sheets was derived from 1993 marked practical exercises that students had failed to collect. In conjunction with several supervising demonstrators, these practical notes were evaluated, and common student errors and comprehension difficulties were identified and recorded. Draft feedback sheets developed from these records were then checked and assessed by us and another supervising demonstrator. Finally, in order to ensure that slight changes in the material and practical notes from year to year were accounted for, one of the supervising demonstrators teaching in the Monday practical class marked notebooks immediately and thus identified any final problems or changes required in the feedback sheets.

All feedback comments were coded using a number (general comments) or a practical notebook page reference and letter (specific comments). While marking practical notes, supervising demonstrators indicated relevant feedback comments to students by writing the number/letter of the appropriate comment on the relevant section of the student's practical notes, or by indicating errors in the practical notes with a cross and circling the relevant numbers/letters on the feedback sheet.

Feedback sheets were developed and implemented for all Biology 600-101 practical sessions in Semester 1, 1994. Marked sheets

were handed to students with their returned practical notes, and students were advised to read and think about the comments.

Evaluation

The effectiveness of the above initiatives was evaluated by a questionnaire distributed to students on 18 May 1994. The results of this questionnaire were compared with those from a similar questionnaire administered at the end of Semester 1 in 1993. Responses to pertinent questions appear in the Notes . In 1994 there were approximately 620 students who returned the questionnaire, and this represents in excess of a 50% sample. In 1993 there were approximately 920 students who responded, which represents about a 77% sample.

Generally Biology has increased its overall rating over the past two years, and it received its highest rating in the most recent survey (see Figures 1 and 2, Notes). It remains to be established whether this increase is due at least in part to the initiatives discussed above, or due mainly to other factors such as improved facilities, e.g. the Public Lecture Theatre and a new Biology tutorial room, although the former was available through 1993.

Biology consists of three main components: lectures, practicals, and tutorials, and each of these was assessed separately. The popularity of lectures increased marginally (mean in 1993= 3.520; mean in 1994= 3.607) (Figure 3, Notes); this is likely due to two factors: more accomplished use of the PLT by lecturing staff and the provision of lecture summaries to students.

The popularity of practicals changed its distribution from distinctly skewed to a more normal distribution (Figure 4, Notes), and overall the rating declined slightly (mean in 1993= 3.525; mean in 1994= 3.461). The reasons for this are unknown, but may relate to teething problems with the feedback sheets and a consequent enhanced perception of fairness of marking. However, the latter is difficult to assess, as comparable data are available only from a 1993 survey in Semester 2 (Figure 5, Notes), when students tend to have a more pragmatic and perhaps less idealistic approach to their work.

The comment sheets were widely used by students, and they were found to be generally useful (Figures 6 and 7, Notes). An analysis of written comments from 209 students (see Notes) indicated that a large proportion of students found the comment sheets too general and/or impersonal to be of full use, and there was inconsistent use of the sheets by supervising demonstrators. It is worth noting that two repeating students stated that the system was an improvement on last year.

The most striking change in popularity was in the tutorial component of the subject (mean in 1993= 3.760; mean in 1994= 4.080) (Figure 8, Notes). Tutorial staff are the same as in 1993; however, there has been an improvement in the tutorial room, in addition to the initiatives mentioned above. The self-quizzes were well received by students and the majority found them useful (Figure 9, Notes).

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the funding of this project by the National Staff Development Fund (Cathie

Fund). We thank the Biology 101 Supervising Demonstrators, whose assistance and experience contributed greatly to the development of the laboratory feedback sheets. We also thank the staff of the Biology Department for their assistance in printing and distributing the sheets to students.

Notes

FIGURE 1

MEAN BIOLOGY RATING 1992 -1994 (5 = EXCELLENT; 1 = POOR)

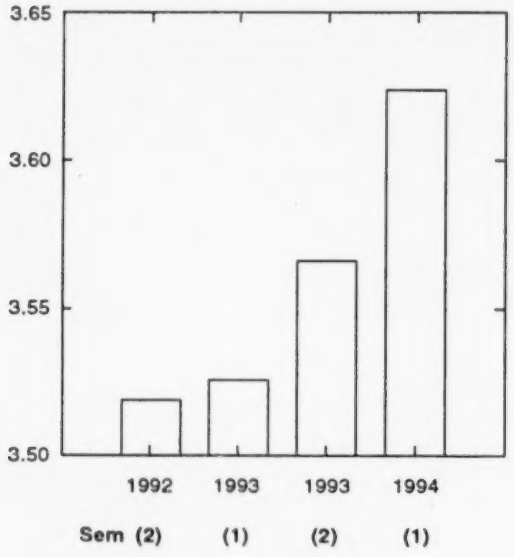


FIGURE 2

Q. 1 WHEN COMPARED TO ALL OTHER FIRST YEAR SUBJECTS YOU HAVE TAKEN, HOW WOULD YOU RATE BIOLOGY?

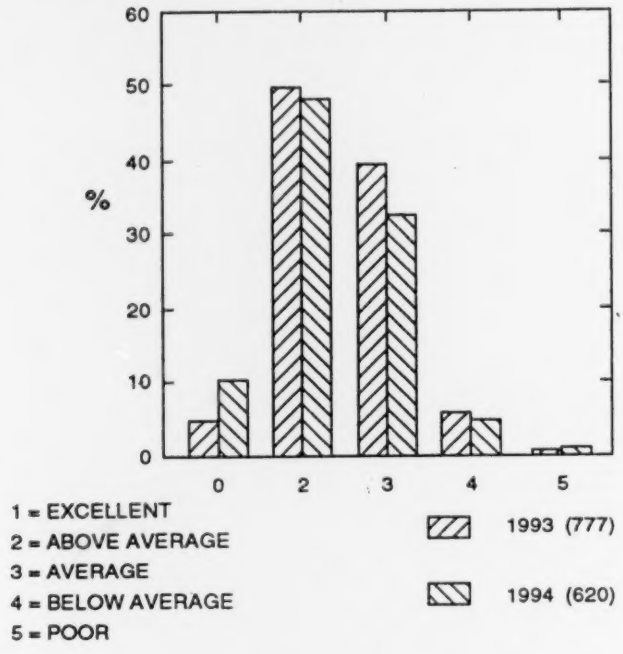


FIGURE 3

Q. 2 WHEN COMPARED TO ALL OTHER FIRST YEAR SUBJECTS YOU HAVE TAKEN, HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE BIOLOGY LECTURES OVERALL?

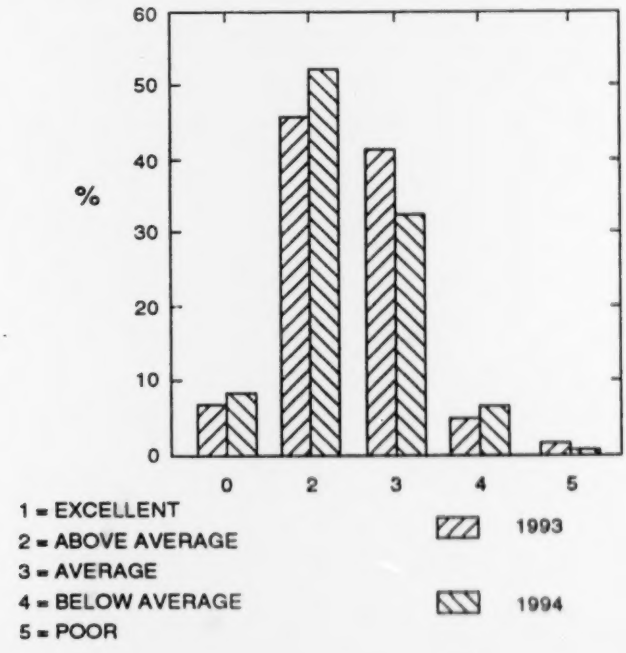
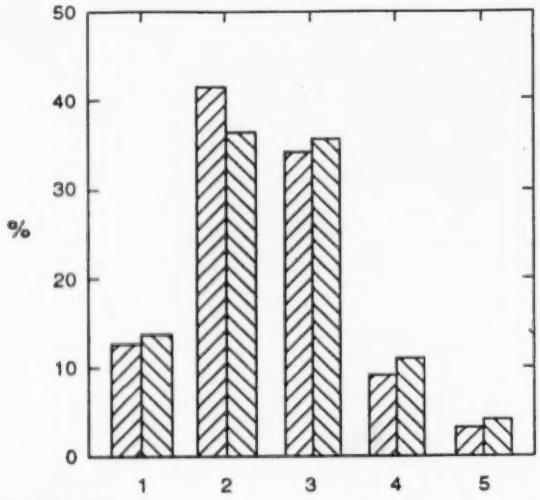


FIGURE 4

Q. 12 HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE PRACTICAL COMPONENT OF BIOLOGY?

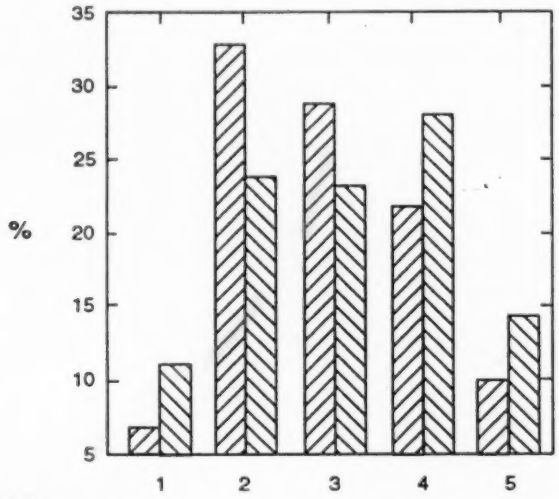


1 = EXCELLENT
2 = ABOVE AVERAGE
3 = AVERAGE
4 = BELOW AVERAGE
5 = POOR

1993 (896)
1994 (609)

FIGURE 5

Q. 16 HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE CURRENT SYSTEM OF MARKING PRACTICALS?

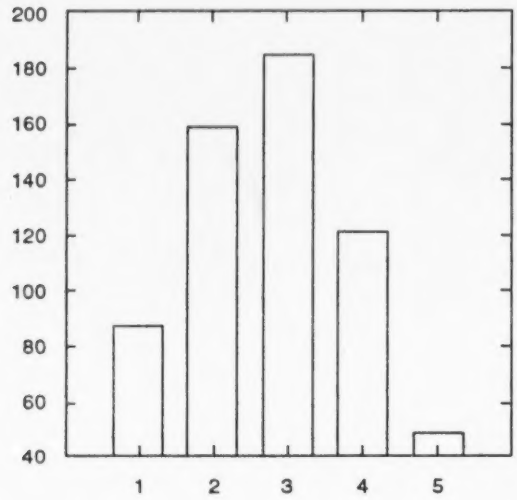


1 = FAIR
2 = MOSTLY FAIR
3 = AVERAGE
4 = SOMETIMES FAIR
5 = UNFAIR

1993 (SEM 2)
1994

FIGURE 6

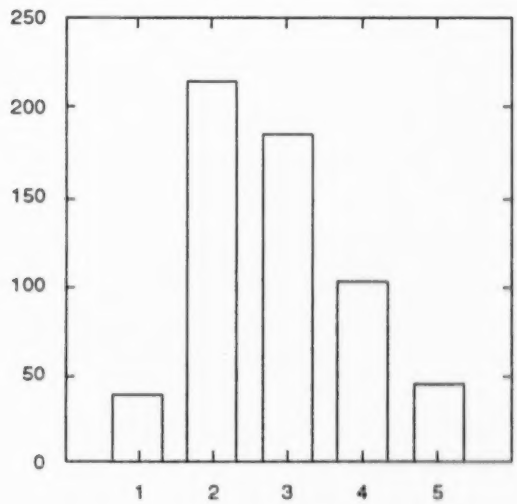
Q. 17 DO YOU READ AND USE THE COMMENT SHEETS?



1 = EVERY WEEK
2 = MOST WEEKS
3 = SOMETIMES
4 = ONCE OR TWICE
5 = NEVER

FIGURE 7

Q. 18 HOW DO YOU FIND THE COMMENT SHEETS?



1 = HIGHLY USEFUL
2 = GENERALLY USEFUL
3 = AVERAGE
4 = NOT VERY USEFUL
5 = USELESS

Analysis of Written Comments

Students were invited to provide comments about Feedback Comment Sheets. 257 students provided written comments in response.

Approximately 41% of the respondents found the sheets too general and/or too impersonal. Constructive criticism included suggestions of model diagrams and answers and a space for written individual comments.About 24% of respondents found the sheets, above all, good, useful or helpful, whilst 7% found them of little use. Many students indicated that the sheets were a good idea in principle, but that they were too general.

Many students (28%) reported that they felt the comment sheets were not being used appropriately by staff, and many complained of lack of comments despite mediocre marks. Students indicated that the number of a comment should be marked in the practical in the appropriate place.

It was reported that the comment sheets were returned too late to be useful for the next practical. Some students complained that there was little correspondence between the mark given and comments circled on the comment sheet, and that there was need for a marking scheme.

FIGURE 8

Q. 23 HOW WOULD YOU ASSESS THE RELEVANCE OF TUTORIALS?

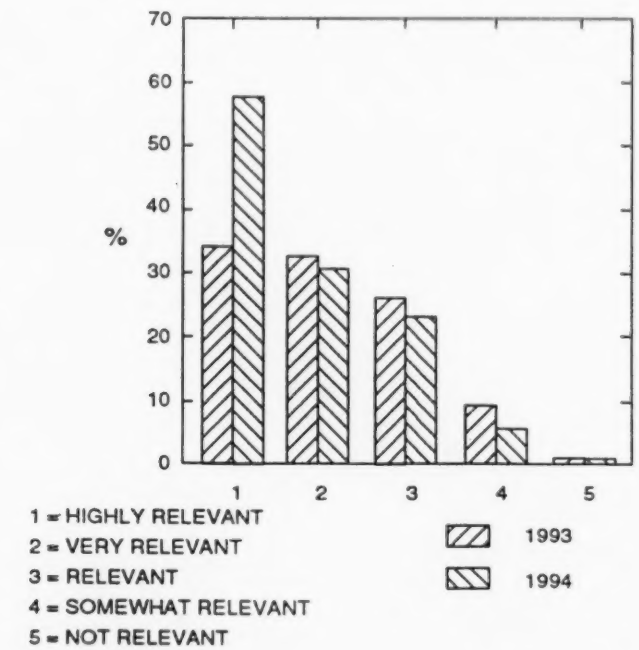
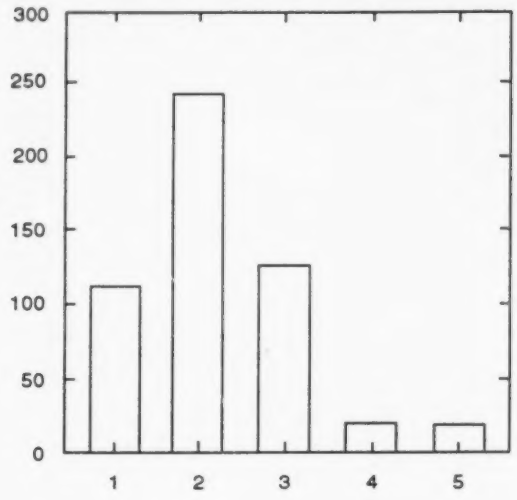


FIGURE 9

Q. 24 HOW DO YOU RATE THE SELF-QUIZZES?



1 = VERY USEFUL
2 = USEFUL
3 = AVERAGE
4 = NOT VERY USEFUL
5 = USELESS

Beginners Chinese: CSHE Staff Development Project

Diane Manwaring and Wu Yunji

Chinese is a difficult language to learn. The United States Foreign Service Institute has issued figures which show that on a 5-point scale it takes 720 hours of instruction to reach the lowest level of proficiency in Chinese compared with 240 hours for languages such as French, Norwegian or Swahili. An average university language course at the University of Melbourne has about 150 contact hours per year. By the time a student has completed the three year core course in Chinese in our department they have received approximately 450 hours of instruction.

The specific difficulties in learning Chinese fall into three areas: characters, tones and grammar. The Chinese language does not use an alphabet. Each syllable in the language is represented by a character. A word may consist of one or more syllables. The pronunciation and the meaning of each character has to be learned individually. To read a newspaper requires a knowledge of around 3000 characters. The learning of characters is one of the most onerous tasks faced by students of Chinese. Probably the vast majority of a student's time outside of class is taken up with the memorising of characters.

Chinese is a tonal language. This means that the same sound pronounced in a different tone has a different meaning. While most students are able to achieve an acceptable level of pronunciation with regard to the sounds of the language, the mastery of the tonal system is much more difficult, both in terms of recognition and production.

Chinese belongs to the Sinitic family of languages. In grammatical terms it has practically nothing in common with English. Although it can be argued that Chinese grammar is actually much simpler than English or French grammar (e.g. there are no tenses), its alien nature and the lack of a common cultural background can make it very difficult for students to grasp.

Chinese suffers from a paucity of teaching materials. Unlike our European colleagues, there are few textbooks and not much audio-visual material to choose from. In 1992 we acquired a video program, *Ni Hao, Beijing*, which we used as supplementary material in the beginners course in 1993. The university has invested in a computer assisted language learning (CALL) laboratory which it is keen for language departments to use and the Horwood Language Centre has purchased a copy of MacZi, a software package for Chinese.

Our first year course for beginners students of Chinese had remained essentially the same for five years. There had been some differences in speed and approach by different teachers but the basis of the course has been a textbook called *Modern Chinese Beginners Course*, produced by the Beijing Languages Institute, China's leading institution for the teaching of Chinese to foreigners.

We saw our participation in this project as an opportunity to review our whole first year program with the aims of maximising student progress, incorporating the video program more effectively into the course and

investigating the application of computer technology as an aid to student learning. We hoped to draw up a teaching program for the beginners course which would make a more effective use of class time and which would help students to better cope with the demands of learning Chinese.

Our first step was to ascertain the views of students enrolled in the beginners course (i.e. the class of 1993) concerning the course as it was and to explore with them some changes that we had in mind.

Initially we decided to meet with the students in small groups. It proved difficult to arrange a time but finally two meetings were arranged with three students. Kate Beattie and Clare Simmons of the Centre for the Study of Higher Education also attended these meetings and took notes for us. On the basis of these meetings a questionnaire was drawn up which was given to the students in the beginners classes to fill in. Twenty students out of a total of thirty-four who sat the final exam completed the questionnaire.

The questionnaire revealed that students who had enrolled in Beginners Chinese were almost equally divided between those who had done so out of interest and those who hoped to improve their job prospects by studying Chinese. Students had a great variety of expectations of the course before they enrolled. However, the vast majority of them said that their expectations had been fulfilled. Students were asked about the amount of time spent in class on listening comprehension, speaking practice, reading and writing. Except for speaking practice, the vast majority of students thought the time spent on each was about right. In the case of speaking practice, a clear majority felt that not enough time was spent on this in class. A clear majority also felt the speed at which the course was taught was too fast though half of these said it was only too fast in second semester. In second semester a different lecturer took over the course and the speed was considerably faster than in the first semester.

Students reported spending from half an hour a week up to twelve hours a week learning characters. About half spent up to six hours a week. A majority considered that they did not spend enough time learning characters. The maximum amount of time spent on the set homework was six hours per week but four students reported that they did no homework. Almost half the students appeared to be doing 2 to 4 hours of homework per week. While the majority thought the amount they were doing was about right, a substantial minority thought they were not doing enough. A majority of students were dissatisfied with the progress they had made, some saying that the speed of the course was too fast but others saying their lack of progress was their own fault because they had not done sufficient work outside of class. The teaching staff expects students to spend about two hours studying out of class for every hour in class. It would appear that the majority of students are spending less than that.

Contrary to expectations students were happy with the textbook, *Modern Chinese Beginners Course*. When asked about the video program, *Ni Hao, Beijing*, equal numbers of students said they understood about half or some of it. Only two students understood most of it. There was a variety of suggestions

as to how students might gain more from the video, the most popular being vocabulary sheets, preparation beforehand and pausing the video. The majority of students were interested in using computers to learn characters and were also prepared to spend extra time in the computer lab each week. One hour appeared to be the most popular amount of time. However, a minority of students either did not want to or had reservations about spending extra time in the lab.

Students were also asked what suggestions they would like to make concerning the course. This provoked such a wide variety of responses that it is not easy to single out any one as dominant. However, the suggestion that had the most adherents was for more oral work.

We gave careful consideration to these findings. We made an in principle decision to devote more class time to the aural/oral component of the course and to increase the marks for assessment of this component, not only because of the extra time devoted to it but because experience has shown that students allocate their study time in proportion to the amount of assessment. We also concluded that while the majority of students claimed they were prepared to spend time out of class using the computers, it would be leaving it too much to chance to rely on this. We also had to take into account those students who said they were not prepared to spend time out of class using the computers. We decided if we were to use computers in our course it would be wise to allocate class time to this. These changes would mean less time could be devoted to the textbook. As this would mean less material would be covered, we hoped that would deal with students' concerns about the speed of the course. However, there is clearly a contradiction between students' desires to progress and a lack of willingness or inability to devote the necessary time to study.

Our next step was to familiarise ourselves with CALL materials and techniques.The only department of Chinese which appears to be running a full scale CALL program is the University of New South Wales which developed the MacZi program. A few departments had very limited software applications mostly for IBM machines which were of no use to us as the CALL lab in the Horwood Language Centre is Mac.

In addition to consulting our Japanese colleagues who are the most advanced users of CALL at this university, we also attended a course run by the Horwood Language Centre devoted to the uses of CALL and the development of CALL skills. As a result of this course and the advice of our Japanese and other language teaching colleagues it became clear to us that the development of CALL materials is likely to be a long and slow process, requiring both computer and language skills. Such a task is not to be undertaken lightly. We were also warned that considerable class time needs to be spent familiarising students with the computers and that it was unlikely that a full class could be devoted each week to CALL material.

We made a careful study of both the MacZi program and the accompanying textbook *You Can Speak Mandarin.* As the MacZi program was developed specifically for this textbook,

the simplest solution for us would have been to replace our current textbook. However, after closely examining *You Can Speak Mandarin*, it was considered that the large number of linguistic errors in it made it unsuitable for use as the basis of our course. Macquarie University is at present working on a distance education program for Chinese which will involve a revamped version of the *You Can Speak Mandarin* material which should eliminate the problems we have found. However, this course is not yet ready for publication. Given these problems and the somewhat unexpected response in favour of our current textbook by our students we decided to retain it for the present.

As the MacZi program is geared to *You Can Speak Mandarin* there are problems in adapting it to run with a different textbook. However, given the time constraints and difficulties in developing our own material and the fact that the Horwood Language Centre had already purchased the MacZi program, we decided to investigate whether with careful selection of material we might still be able to make use of it.

In the light of what we had learned and bearing in mind the student responses to the questionnaire, we drew up a teaching program for first semester, 1994. In the old course we had one lecture and five language classes per week. We decided to change this to one lecture, three language classes, one language laboratory class and one multi-media class per week. The multi-media class would incorporate CALL and the *Ni Hao, Beijing* video course. The language laboratory class would make use of the listening comprehension tapes that had been developed by the Beijing Languages Institute to accompany our present text book.

In their responses to the questionnaire students indicated that they wanted more oral work. At the same time, however, they also indicated that they considered the amount of time spent on reading and writing was appropriate. The inherent contradiction in this is that by increasing the time spent on one area, less time has to be spent on other areas. In order to deal with this, we have produced a standard character practice book for students. We are collating homework and revision exercises that have been developed by one of our tutors into book form and are writing a series of grammar handouts to make up for deficiencies in the grammar explanations in our current text book. Through these additional materials we hope to improve our students' understanding of the grammatical features of Chinese and maintain their written competence, as the amount of time devoted to this aspect has been decreased.

A program for first semester was drawn up for the computer classes, covering the use of the computer and the various components of the computer course: *Writing Tutor* and *Radical* (which introduce the basic structure of characters), *Tone Test* (pronunciation and tone recognition), *Unit* (stroke order, sound and meaning of new characters), *Magic Square* (revision of characters by unit) and *Index* (general revision of characters). The MacZi program consists of twenty units each with thirty characters, a total of six hundred characters. The first volume of *Modern Chinese Beginners Course* introduces four hundred characters. We aimed to teach the

students the stroke order, pronunciation and meaning of the characters introduced in their basic textbook through this introduction to the MacZi program.

From the questionnaire it was clear that students had problems comprehending the material in *Ni Hao, Beijing* and found this discouraging. In 1993 the video course was used on a fortnightly basis purely as supplementary comprehension material. In order for it to serve its purpose of improving students' oral/aural competence it was necessary to integrate it more closely with our teaching. A study was made of the grammatical points used in *Ni Hao, Beijing* and a schedule drawn up that would align the video material more closely with the material introduced in the textbook. As the accompanying text book for the video course is entirely in Chinese there was no point in prescribing it for our students. Instead we prepared supplementary material for the students which included vocabulary used in the video but not in their main text book, as well as character versions of the conversations. Instead of just showing the video to the students, it is now a focal point of classroom activities.

Unfortunately, the language laboratory tapes that we ordered caused us some problems in the short term. The tapes which are supposedly designed for beginners have all instructions in Chinese. If the students' level of knowledge of Chinese was such that they could understand these instructions they would be in our highest not our lowest class. We attempted at first merely to insert English instructions into the original tapes but this proved to be an extremely slow process. Coupled with the fact that many exercises on the tapes did not leave sufficient time for student responses, we decided in the end to re-record all the tapes ourselves. So far we have recorded about half the tapes. We hope to complete the recording in the semester break.

In the light of the changes we had introduced into the course, we gave serious consideration to the most appropriate form of assessment. Experience has shown that students are unlikely to devote time and energy to any activity which is not formally assessed. Accordingly we decided to make major changes to our assessment. In 1993, as in previous years, Beginners Chinese assessment was as follows: written mid-year test 20%, final oral test 20% and final written test 60%. In the light of the greater emphasis placed on the oral/aural component in our teaching it was decided to have a split of 60% written and 40% oral/aural, thus doubling the marks for listening and speaking skills. It was decided to retain a majority of marks for written work in recognition of the particular difficulties of mastering written Chinese. An oral/aural test was instituted at mid-year to complement the written mid-year test.

Originally we had planned to survey our students before the end of first semester, using a questionnaire similar to the one we used with last year's students. However, we decided to postpone this until second semester as in the first half of this semester we were faced with severe problems over which we had no control.

Firstly, the department does not have sufficient classrooms so it is necessary to apply to the Facilities Hiring Office for extra classrooms. We were not informed until the Thursday afternoon of Orientation week which rooms we had been allocated. Not knowing when or where rooms would be available, we were only able to advertise one set of classes. Student enrolments in the subject required three groups in Beginners Chinese. We were not the only subject affected and complete chaos ensued. Eventually it was all sorted out. However, some rooms are quite unsuitable for the classes that are using them but there is nothing we can do about it.

Secondly, the course Standard Chinese, was cancelled at the end of 1993. Due to student protests, it was reinstated by the School of Languages in the first week of term in 1994. This caused severe timetabling problems and a major shortage of textbooks, as Standard Chinese and Beginners Chinese overlap in first semester. As a result, it was not until the end of April that all students in the beginners course had copies of the main textbook and the listening comprehension workbook.

Accordingly, we considered we would get a more objective assessment of the course from students when the memory of these problems had faded somewhat.

From the point of view of the staff, students appear to be much more confident in their understanding of the video program than they were last year. We will have a better idea of whether the videos and language laboratory classes have helped the students oral/aural competence after the mid-year tests. (See Notes, comparing 1993 and 1994 results.)

With regard to the computer program, we have come to the following conclusions. Learning characters through the computer is clearer and livelier than learning them from the textbook. The computer also helps the students to learn to distinguish between the different tones, although it does not help with production of the tones. However, the program is an inflexible one, designed to be used with one textbook only. This has limited its usefulness. As with the textbook there are some serious mistakes in the computer material. We have decided that one semester of computer use is sufficient for our students at this stage. They are now familiar with all the elements of the MacZi program and are capable of using it for self-study. Class time can now more profitably be devoted to other activities. We will use the format that we have developed for the computer class in first semester next year.

We are grateful for the time release we have been given to take part in this program. It has enabled us to revamp our beginners course into a more lively and integrated program, incorporating language laboratory and multi-media classes. We have also developed a practice book and other support materials, and have placed increased emphasis on listening/speaking skills in the course and in assessment. We are pleased with our progress and are confident that the mid-year assessment and second semester evaluation will further demonstrate that these changes have better enabled us to meet our students' needs.

Notes

1994 Beginners Chinese Questionnaire Report

1. 1993: Twenty students out of 34 who sat the final exam filled in the questionnaire.

1994: Thirty students out of a total of 38 who sat the final exam filled in the 1994 questionnaire.

2. 1993: The questionnaire revealed that students who had enrolled in Beginners Chinese were almost equally divided between those who had done so out of interest and those who hoped to improve their job prospects by studying Chinese.

1994: The number of students who enrolled out of personal interest was almost double those who enrolled for career purposes.

3. 1993: Students had a great variety of expectations of the course before they enrolled. However, the vast majority of them said that their expectations had been fulfilled.

1994: Same as in 1993.

4. 1993: Students were asked about the amount of time spent in class on listening comprehension, speaking practice, reading and writing. Except for speaking practice, the vast majority of students thought the time spent was about right. In the case of speaking practice, a clear majority felt that not enough time was spent on this in class.

1994: A clear majority of students felt that the amount of time spent on listening comprehension and reading was about right. Almost half the students felt that not enough time was spent on writing. There was a very small increase in the students satisfied with the amount of time devoted to speaking: 38% versus 35%.

This result is somewhat disappointing given the extra time devoted to oral work. The reflection of this extra time is shown in the increase of student disastisfaction with writing as this is the time which was sacrificed for the extra oral work.

5.1993: A clear majority felt the speed at which the course was taught was too fast though half of these said it was only too fast in second semester. In second semester a different lecturer took over the course and the speed was considerably faster than in the first semester.
1994: Two-thirds of students were satisified with the speed of the course. The rest thought it was either too fast or too slow.

6. 1993: Students reported spending from half an hour a week up to twelve hours a week learning characters. About half spent up to six hours a week. A majority considered that they did not spend enough time learning characters.

1994: Students reported spending from one to ten hours per week learning their characters. The vast majority spent less than 5 hours per week. Two thirds of students felt that this was not enough time.

7. 1993: The maximum amount of time spent on the set homework was six hours per week but four students reported that they did no homework. Almost half the students appeared to be doing 2 to 4 hours of homework per week. While the majority thought the amount they were doing was about right, a substantial minority thought they were not doing enough.

1994: The maximum amount of time spent on the set homework was three hours per week. Over 80% of students spent 1-2 hours per week on the set homework.

This may reflect a different approach to set homework in the course. All three groups had to do the same homework, no matter who the tutor was. Additional work was up to the individual tutors.

Only one-sixth of students did not think they were spending enough time on the homework.

8. 1993: A majority of students was dissatisfied with the progress they had made, some saying that the speed of the course was too fast but others saying their lack of progress was their own fault because they had not done sufficient work outside of class. The teaching staff expects students to spend about two hours studying out of class for every hour in class. It would appear that the majority of students is spending less than that.

1994: About half the students are satisfied with their progress, a third are dissatisfied and the rest did not venture an opinion. The majority of those dissastisfied with their progress said it was their own fault or it was due to some external reason.

9. 1993: Contrary to expectations students were happy with the textbook, *Modern Chinese Beginners Course*.

1994: Only 4 students disliked the textbook. 3 were tepid in their assessment of it.

10. 1993: When asked about the video program, *Ni Hao, Beijing*, equal numbers of students said they understood about half or some of it. Only two students understood most of it.

1994: Almost half the students understood most of the video and about one third understood half. The rest all understood some. This is a big improvement.

11. 1993: The majority of students was interested in using computers to learn characters and was also prepared to spend extra time in the computer lab each week. One hour appeared to be the most popular amount of time. However, a minority of students either did not want to or had reservations about spending extra time in the lab.

1994: Asked whether they found the computer program worthwhile, equal numbers said yes and no and almost as many replied 'sort of'. Most students spent no or little time on the program outside of class. About two-thirds of students thought the amount of time spent was about right.

12. 1994: Students were asked a number of questions which had not been asked the previous year:

a. the amount of time spent on the listening comprehension tapes outside of class:

Slightly more than half spent an hour or more a week but 20% spent none. The vast majority thought the amount of time spent was not enough.

b. the amount of time spent altogether on studying Chinese:

This varied from one hour per week to 14-21 hours per week. The average was slightly over 5 hours per week. We repeat the belief of the staff that Chinese requires an average of two hours per week for every hour in class. Looked at another way, students gain 37.5 points credit for Beginners Chinese. This works out to a total of 15 hours over a forty hour week. Six contact hours and five hours out of class falls well short of this.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Fine Arts Department CSHE Staff Development Project

Chris McAuliffe and Angela Ndalianos

The Fine Arts Department offers three first-year subjects (six single-semester units). Two of these were the focus for activities within the Cathie Porject first year teaching program; 111-103 Modern and Postmodern Visual Arts, and 111-105 Introduction to Cinema A: Classical Hollywood and Art Cinema. The course co-ordinators in both subjects, Mr. Chris McAuliffe (Modernism) and Ms. Angela Ndalianis (Cinema Studies), have formulated programs that differ slightly, in accordance with the demands of materials studied, however several fundamental aims are held in common.

Through CSHE research (*Quality in the First Year Experience*) and our own experience we are conscious of some of the problems faced by first-year students, particularly those relating to integration into the intellectual and pedagogical context of the university. Our proposals addressed the problems students have in understanding the demands of tertiary education, using the facilities the campus has to offer, and adjusting to different classroom activities and pedagogical expectations. In particular, we aimed at addressing issues of classroom activity and assessment. We wanted more student activity in the classroom and greater awareness of the aims of assessment, the skills it requires and the ways to handle it successfully. In part this was achieved by improving existing practices; for example, improving lectures, briefing and monitoring tutors more effectively, improving course materials etc. However, we also wanted to initiate new activities in the areas of classroom work and assessment. With this in mind we set up an integrated series of exercises which aimed towards smoothing the transition from VCE to the university while providing students with the basic academic skills needed in our discipline.

Our fundamental goals were:

- to increase classroom participation
- to establish clearer understanding of the aims of subjects, and the nature and standards of academic activity at the university
- to develop fundamental skills: research, analysis, comprehension, argumentation.

The basic strategies we devised were:

- to develop classroom activities that increase participation
- to develop classroom activities that build confidence, fundamental skills and understanding of academic standards
- to develop assignments that focus on: research, analytical and argumentative skills, ability to use university facilities, understanding of the nature of assessment
- to spread exercises over semester so as to gradually introduce students to the system while providing regular feedback (leading up to the production of the major essay at the end of the semester)
- to integrate classroom activities and assignments so that they prepare students tor major pieces of work.

Implementation

Teaching activities and materials included:

- more clearly structured lectures: topics clearly signalled; place in overall course signalled; themes of supporting tutorials signalled; a variety of methodologies identified and demonstrated; visual aids (overheads, slides, videos) to be used more effectively; guest lecturers to be briefed on project
- course material providing clear indication of aims and objectives for the semester as a whole and on a week by week basis
- providing a clearly defined topic for each week (frequently using a 'case-study' approach)
- nominating a key work of art, film, and text for each tutorial (film tutorials/lectures also included additional excerpts from other films useful to the week's topic)
- making assigned readings more focused
- increasing difficulty of assigned readings over the semester

In short, more focus and more signposts.

Tutorials: Classroom Activities

While tutorials are meant to function as an arena in which students can develop, exchange and explore various issues and ideas, the reality can be quite different. A number of factors can come into play. Often, certain students dominate class discussion while others find it extremely difficult to express their opinions. Another problem which emerges is when tutorials take on the form of mini-lectures (for various reasons which may include the tutor's teaching methods, the fact that students have not done their reading and the tutor takes over, or the formal class presentation which does not allow for a great deal of exchange).

It was decided that a series of classroom activities could be implemented so that tutorials could provide an atmosphere in which students would be involved more directly and actively in the flow and exchange of ideas, allowing for a forum in which they could become more comfortable in expressing their own viewpoints, voicing any difficulties they may have with the reading material assigned them etc., and developing a clearer sense of expectations placed on them.

Rather than having a static set of activities which were repeated on a weekly basis, the aim overall was to emphasise variety. Tutors were often encouraged to take initiative as to which activities were to be employed; for example, different tutorial groups may require different approaches that focus on specific teaching/learning problems, likewise the occasional 'ideal' tutorial group may require very few of the following activities on a more formalised level to initiate them in articulating their thoughts etc. Course coordinators and tutors met regularly to map out strategies for coming weeks, to review previous tutorials and to reinforce the goals of the project.

Tutorial activities included:

- icebreakers, name games etc. used especially at the start of the semester
- group work every few weeks where students were given a specific question on a film scene, painting, reading etc. to respond to; this worked particularly well when groups were asked to respond to different issues based around one film/work of art etc. and report back to the tutorial group as a whole
- reading reports: students were given a brief (5 minutes max.) report on a nominated key text, identifying content, mode of argument, and giving a personal response. This was not assessed; the aim was to encourage regular reading, the expression of

opinions and to impress upon students the bibliocritical element of the discipline. This activity was particularly effective in tutorial groups which failed to complete the weekly reading and/or were silent in class. After a few weeks of reading reports, with some of the groups it was no longer necessary to formalise the reading/expression of opinion process.

- In order to focus discussion a nominated work was focused on in detail (eg. a scene from a film, painting, sculpture etc.); issues raised by the week's readings were also related to this work in order to clarify the ways text and work can interrelate constructively. This form of discussion occurred in a variety of ways: tutorial group as a whole, specific individuals assigned task of leading discussion, group work etc.

- Various techniques were employed to get everyone in the tutorial to speak (e.g. while showing a scene from one of the films, one of the tutors asked students to pass around the remote control and pause at chosen points to comment on elements of style, narrative etc. The remote control was passed around until everyone had contributed something to the discussion. Student response was very positive and no one waived their turn at contributing.

- Techniques such as semi-formal debates were used to encourage discussion and to stress that the tutorial was to be used for the exchange of ideas.

Classroom activities were supported by extensive briefing of tutors and follow up assessment of effectiveness of materials, activities, assignments.

In implementing the above, it was intended that students would:

- feel comfortable participating in tutorials
- feel that they are contributing to learning
- develop regular working patterns
- develop skills in analysis and argumentation.

Assignments and Activities outside the Tutorial

With regard to assessment, previously students were required to submit two pieces of work per semester. The first piece consisted either of an essay to be submitted around mid-semester (or a tutorial presentation which was submitted as a written paper); the final piece was an essay submitted at the end of the semester. This structure did not allow for students to receive adequate feedback prior to the submission of their final essay. In addition it was assumed that students already knew what was required in a university-standard essay. Likewise, the first essay/paper is not an adequate means by which students can develop a variety of analytical and argumentative skills to their best advantage since it demands that the student recognise, develop and utilise a number of skills simultaneously.

Rather than submitting two assessable pieces in the course of the semester, this structure was broken up into a series of short exercises which focused on developing various skills and methods required of students in the course, skills which would be of use to the completion of the final essay. Students were expected to do more assignments and activities than previously but these were shorter and some were not formally assessable. An added advantage of this system was that it emulated the task-oriented structure of the VCE; students were able to build on existing, familiar patterns of activity. While both courses followed a similar structure with regards to assessment, due to differences in some of the course aims, the form that the assessment took altered slightly.

Modern and Postmodern Visual Arts: assessment schedule

Weeks 2 & 3: Library tours (approx. one hour duration)

Weeks 4, 5 & 6: *Ariadne's Thread* (approx. one hour duration)

Week 4, 25th March: Visual analysis due

Easter Break: 1st-10th April

Week 6: Visual analysis returned

Week 7, 22nd April: Critical reading exercise due

Week 9: Critical reading exercise returned

Week II, 20th May: Annotated bibliography due

Week 12: Annotated bibliography returned

Week 13, 3rd June: Essay due 16th June: Make-up exams for unsubmitted assignments

Library tour

Task: Special library tours were organised in which library staff introduced students to the areas of the collection specifically related to their subject. This included practical information on actual location of texts but also an introduction to research tools such as abstracts and indexes. It was assumed that the tour would be taken in conjunction with the general tours organised by the Baillieu Library in Semester 1.

Monitoring: This task was voluntary; it was neither formally assessed nor a hurdle requirement. Since students signed up for allocated times it was possible to determine that c.40% of enrolled students signed on. Informal feedback suggested about 25% of enrolled students attended. These students found the session useful.

Evaluation: Attendance rate was not as high as was hoped. Information on the library as a research tool was perhaps premature, since students weren't really thinking of essay research at this stage of the semester. Since the sessions require minimal organisational effort from the course coordinator, they are worth maintaining. However, their significance must be stressed to the students. Liaison with library staff may develop a more practical focus to the tours.

***Ariadne's Thread*: Interactive multimedia catalogue orientation**

Task: *Ariadne's Thread* is a newly developed interactive multimedia computer program designed to teach students the intricacies of the university's computerised library catalogue. The program combines tutorials, glossary, case studies and exercises in order to develop a 'hands on' familiarity with the system and the best techniques for specific research tasks.

Monitoring: This task was voluntary; it was neither formally assessed nor a hurdle requirement. Since students signed up for allocated times it was possible to determine that c. 25% of enrolled students signed on. Informal feedback suggested about 5% of enrolled students attended.

Evaluation: Attendance was extremely poor, perhaps because the task followed immediately after the library tour. A version of the program was installed in the Fine Arts Department library to allow further informal access during the semester. The skills developed in this task are of sufficient importance to warrant making it a formal hurdle requirement for the subject. Since the program requires the students to login by

name, it would be easy to monitor participation for assessment purposes. Both library tasks suggest that it is difficult, in the early weeks of first year, to convince students that an engagement with the 'nuts and bolts' of university facilities is worthwhile. More forceful promotion is necessary, along assessment penalties as a goad.

Visual analysis (500 words)

Task: The aim was to introduce students to the analysis of art works; moving them beyond mere art appreciation without exacerbating any fears that they might have about meeting university standards. To this end the students were presented with a specific question, forcing them to analyse art works closely, while focusing the assignment on a discernible task. No research was required; it was made clear to the students that the exercise was a 'warm-up' intended to introduce them to analytical and writing skills. An added tactic was the use of actual sculptures in Melbourne as the focus; students were encouraged to treat the project as field-work and to recognise the 'real world' element of academic study. Specific instructions on the aims of the assignment and the method of presentation were provided.

Monitoring: All assignments were marked by the student's tutor. (As were the following two, so that tutors could develop a familiarity with individual students.) Tutors swapped several marked essays among themselves in order to ensure consistent standards. Assignment were returned within two weeks of submission, prior to the deadline for the next assignment. The apprehension of the goals of the assignment was excellent, with few students failing to understand the task. On return of the assignment, a section of a tutorial was set aside to discuss standards of work and to gauge student response.

Evaluation: This exercise was extremely successful; students, while apprehensive about their first assignment, were at least confident that they knew what had to be done. Students saw the task as a useful beginning at a practical level, but also felt that it gave an historical subject a contemporary relevance (e.g. they realised that the subject involved objects that they could actually see). The brevity of the assignment tended to result in rather narrow, and occasionally mechanistic arguments, however. Classroom discussion revealed an almost unanimous support for formal feedback sheets accompanying graded essays . Tutors found the assignments much easier to grade because of their focus and brevity. Staff-student liaison meetings unrelated to this project suggest that students want teaching activities that have a 'hands-on' or 'real world' sense to them: this kind of field work assignment seems to fit the bill.

Critical reading assignment (500 words)

Task: In preparation for the research essay, this assignment was intended to alert students to the need for critical assessment of texts. Students were given two passages discussing the same art work and artist. They were asked to nominate the strengths and weakness of both, and which they found the most convincing. No special research was required; students were instructed to rely on their own powers of interpretation, analysis

and expression. The texts selected demonstrated that art history consisted of a variety of divergent methodologies; introducing a theoretical element to the subject early in the piece.

Monitoring: As for above exercise

Evaluation: Again, this assignment was extremely useful in alerting students to the skills and standards of the university. While the brevity of the exercise remained a problem, it was clear that students had benefited from feedback to the first assignment; fundamentals of argumentation and expression were consistently good. It was also clear that students had recognised, and were prepared to engage with, issues of method. In addition, classroom discussions suggested that students gained a sense of confidence in feeling that they were able to criticise academic texts.

Annotated bibliography (500 words)

Task: Students were instructed to select an essay question, then submit a list of ten to twelve keys texts (books, catalogues or articles) relevant to it. Each entry on the bibliography was to be accompanied by a brief note assessing its relevance to the essay question. The aim was to promote good work strategies (an early start to research) and directed, critical reading. In addition, tutors would be able to alert students to gaps in research, lapses in standard of material (e.g. reliance on VCE standard texts).

Monitoring: As for above.

Evaluation: Perhaps the least successful assignment, primarily because students began work too late, resulting in severe overtaxing of library resources. The assignment is certainly useful (particularly in allowing tutors to monitor progress of each student's research prior to essay deadline) but should be set earlier and made shorter. Course evaluation questionnaires suggested that some students resented this exercise as a kind of 'hoop-jumping' affair, however staff found that it netted several cases where students had poor understanding of research techniques and standards.

Essay (2,500 words)

Task: A conventional research essay responding to a set question. While the nature of the task doesn't differ from previous years, students have been given more information and preparatory exercises.

Monitoring: As for above.

Evaluation: Assignments not submitted at time of this report.

Weekly tutorial activities

Tutorial activities were planned in blocks a four weeks, allowing forward planning and retrospective monitoring. In addition, these planning sessions gave tutors a greater sense of involvement in the subject. Tutors and students alike reported a sense of involvement and energy in the classroom; the level of activity is greater than in previous years. However, the problem of the silent student (and the non-attending student) remains, albeit to a smaller degree.

General comments

Informal feedback suggests that both staff and students alike have welcomed many of the innovations. In particular, the increased number of assignments (and their prompt return) has established a regular work pattern and consistent channels of communication. While students seem more confident that they know the requirements of the subject, staff have been less troubled by daily requests for minor information. Students and staff have a clearer picture of where they stand in the subject, both at a practical and conceptual level.

Formal course evaluation questionnaires raised a number of significant points. Students felt that the aims and objectives of the course were clear, that they had an adequate understanding of the requirements of the subject, and that staff were accessible. There were no significant complaints about the workload or the standard of work required. This tends to confirm the general impression that provision of more information has both a practical and 'psychological' benefit. Likewise, it confirms the anecdotal perception that students do not object to the principle of more and briefer assignments. A disturbing finding, however, was the very widespread agreement with the question stating that 'It would be possible to do well in this subject just by doing the assignments and not attending class'. The emphasis on assignments has perhaps lessened the perceived significance of classroom activities. It is perhaps also possible that too many 'ice-breaking' exercises in tutorials give rise to the impression that tutorials are more recreational than work environments.

Cinema Studies: assessment schedule

Weeks 2 & 3: Library tours, Education Resource Centre (approx. one hour).

Week 5, 31st March: Exercise on narrative form due.

Week 6: Exercise returned in tutorials.

Week 9: Visual test held in tutorials.

Week 11: Visual test comments and grade returned.

Week 12, 27th May: Annotated bibliography due.

Week 13: Annotated bibliography returned.

Week 14, 9th June: Final essay due.

10th June: Make-up exam for unsubmitted essays.

Library Tours

Task: Orientation tours were designed specifically for Cinema Studies students by the librarians at the Education Resource Centre. The tours were held during the third and fourth weeks of semester, and students were advised that the tours would be particularly useful in light of the final two pieces of assessment.

Monitoring: This task was voluntary; it was neither formally assessed nor a hurdle requirement. Since students signed up for allocated times it was possible to determine that about 50% of enrolled students signed on. Feedback from librarians suggested that about 35% of students attended and these students found the session quite useful.

Evaluation: As with 'Modernism in the Visual Arts' attendance was not high. It would perhaps be more useful to organise that these tours take place around the middle of the semester once students have become more accustomed to assessment and research requirements. Staff will need to further stress

the value and significance of these tours in introducing students to the film resources available to them on campus. Also, while the library tour stressed the textual resources, it came to light that due to the fact that film students use the video viewing facilities in Media Services, the tour should also incorporate these services.

Exercise on Narrational Strategies (1000 words)

Task: Students submitted a 1000 word essay analysing one scene chosen from the first five films studied in the course. The first five weeks focused on narrational strategies and film form and the aim of this exercise was to develop skills in film analysis with particular emphasis placed on revealing an understanding of the narrative conventions at film's disposal. While students were not expected to research the essay in rigorous academic mode, it was emphasised that they must not substitute rigorous film analysis for film appreciation or plot summaries.

Monitoring: The exercises were marked by the student's tutor (as were the following assignments so that tutors could develop a familiarity with individual students). Assignments were returned within two weeks of submission. Students responded well to the task, with few students failing to understand what was required of them.

Evaluation: The exercise proved to be very useful, particularly as a follow up to the five weeks spent in lectures and tutorials on narrational strategies. The task helped students articulate aspects of narrative conventions, and apply these conventions constructively to the analysis of a film scene. The word length worked well. It wasn't too limiting and students were able to explore various issues in some depth. While tutors found the assignment easy to grade, problems arose in terms of meeting the deadline for returning the exercises with tutors who had more than two tutorials.

Visual Test (approx. 500 words)

Task: Weeks six to nine of the course focused on aspects of film style (sound, editing, cinematography, mise-en-scène). In the final week on film style, students sat a visual test in tutorials in which they were shown three excerpts from films shown in the lectures or tutorials. The test was comprised of two parts: firstly, they were asked to respond to one scene in relation to a designated area of film style; the second part was a comparison of two scenes on any aspects of film style they considered to be of central importance in the scenes. The aim of this exercise was to develop analytical skills and close visual analysis.

Monitoring: As for above exercise.

Evaluation: Despite initial apprehension by students that the exercise took the form of a test, the reaction of students was very positive. Aside from the preparation required for the test, students liked the fact that the actual completion of the task was over in the 50-55 minutes of tutorial time. The test was particularly useful in gauging how well students had come to terms with film style, as well as determining their ability to locate and analyse key stylistic components in a film scene. The test was very easy to grade due

to the fact that the tests themselves were not returned; students instead received a feedback sheet with tutors' comments.

Annotated Bibliography (500 words)

Task: At the end of week eleven students are to submit an annotated bibliography listing ten references relevant to their nominated essay topic. This exercise is designed to develop research and evaluative skills. The annotated bibliography should be considered as a preliminary research assignment which will aid students in writing the final essay. Attention should be paid to the lucidity of the annotations, the depth of research, and the references' applicability to the topic. The annotated bibliography will be returned in tutorials during the last week of semester.

Monitoring: As for above.

Evaluation: While the assignment was not yet submitted at the time of this report, student feedback has revealed that as with 'Modernism in the Visual Arts', the task has resulted in the overtaxing of library resources. While students were also advised to do research at the Australian Film Institute Library—and many have ventured outside the university—due to the large student numbers, this has still been a burden on the ERC and Baillieu. This is an extremely useful exercise, however, in developing students' research and evaluative skills and it has been used in film courses in the past with very positive results.

Essay (2,000 words)

Task: Essay on a choice of one of a list of set questions; to be submitted at the end of the first week of the non-instruction period. The essay, in conjunction with the annotated bibliography, aim at bringing together the analytical skills gained through the first part of the course with the film theoretical component focused on in the last four weeks of the course; the aim being to develop student's evaluative skills, their ability to engage with source material in a critical manner, and the ability to apply these theories constructively to film analysis.

Monitoring: As for above.

Evaluation: Assignments not submitted at time of this report.

Weekly Tutorial Activities: Tutorial activities varied according to the three part structure of the course. Rather than formalising activities each week, tutors often took initiative and tried out various techniques after discussing approaches with the other tutors. The success (or failure) of these approaches was then related back to the tutors and suggestions were made as to how to improve/develop or further utilise different techniques. Tutors and students alike reported a sense of involvement and energy in the classroom; the level of activity is greater than in previous years. In some tutorials, however, the problem of the silent students still existed—though on the whole it was far less obvious than in previous years.

General Comments

Overall, feedback received from students on a formal level was quite positive. This was further affirmed by more informal feedback from staff and students who have responded

well to the innovatons—in particular the distribution and variety of assessment as well as regular feedback. Both students and staff appear to have a clearer picture of what was required of them in the course with regard to the course aims and objectives. Unlike 'Modernism and Postmodernism', no students voiced the opinion that it would possible to do the course without attending classes; this may possibly be a result of the different types of tasks required, and the fact that greater emphasis is placed on spending tutorial time closely analysing scenes from films (that sometimes students otherwise would have no access to), as well as the fact that many of the skills of close analysis are picked up in classroom time.

Interestingly, while a few students did complain about the introduction of the visual test, most emphasised that they could, however, see the value of it. While some complaints were made regarding the weekly required reading (four per week, which I will reduce to three per week next year), there were no complaints about the assignment structure. The only major difficulty raised concerned access to resources, particularly video accessibility. Given the great student numbers (170 approx.) this was a factor which will only solve itself next year due to the fact that more of the films studied in the course have now arrived on video at the ERC. Finally, the other often raised demand made by students concerned the introduction of course readers, which I am in two minds about. While there are definite positive aspects to the accessibility of reading material for students, some qualified their desire for a course reader by also stating that they 'couldn't be bothered going to the library and going to the reserve desk'.